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ABSTRACT

This book emerged from a Poetry in the Schools program which had two facets: teacher workshops and instruction by poets in elementary and secondary classrooms. Part one, "Poets and Teachers in Dialogue," describes major issues discussed in teacher workshops: keeping the imagination alive, writing as a way of discovery, exploration of language, poets' development as writers, writer as artist, and teaching strategies. Part two, "Students' Spontaneous Responses," presents poems written by students during classroom instruction. The poems are used to illustrate discussions of form, pattern, and design in poetry. Part three, "Students' Sustained Responses," deals with students' writing which resulted from participation in continuing workshops with poets. Some of these poems are presented in several versions, to show the kinds of changes poets may make when they revise. Ten poets participated in this Poetry in the Schools program: William Jay Smith, Kofi Awoonor, John Ciardi, Stephen Dunning, Tom Weatherly, Sylvia Wilkinson, Gloria Oden, Michael Mott, Sally Harris Sange, and Jeffrey Lorber. (GW)

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LAST BUT NOT LEAST
MY POEM

an exploration with writers in the classroom

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Dialogue Series, Volume III

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PREFACE

When asked to write a poem about special things at Christmas time, Jonathan Miller ended with "Last but not least, my poem." Just as that cliché worked for Jonathan in his poem it works for us in the third and last volume of the DIALOGUE series. Last But Not Least, My Poem, offers suggestions for discovering sources and for expressing responses through writing. It combines the individualistic approach taken by poets visiting in the classroom (as was done in the first book of the series: The Turtle and the Teacher) and the use of specific poems to illustrate the craft of writing creatively (as was done in the second book of the series: A Borrower Be). Thus, this volume concludes the DIALOGUE series although Poetry-in-the-Schools continues in Richmond City Public Schools.

Designed to afford exposure to contemporary poetry and poets, Poetry-in-the-Schools in the Richmond area during 1973-1974 had two facets: workshops and classroom instruction.*

There were teacher workshops and student workshops, both continuing throughout the school year. Conducted by the visiting poets, teacher workshops consisted of six sessions lasting three hours. Serving as consultant to the program, Sylvia Wilkinson continually raised questions and made suggestions. In cooperation with School of Education of Virginia Commonwealth University, the Center arranged for teachers to earn one graduate credit in return for workshop and classroom participation. In this way each teacher participated in all workshops although only one poet was scheduled to work with each teacher in the classroom. In four visits to each class selected, the poet interacted with students in workshop situations.

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* Administered in Metropolitan Richmond and surrounding counties by Richmond Humanities Center, Poetry-in-the-Schools is a joint project of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Arts and Humanities Program of the U. S. Office of Education, collaborating with Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title III, on matching-funds basis.

The writing that occurred during these classroom visits, we refer to as *spontaneous responses*. Contrasting with these responses are the *sustained responses* generated during one and two semester student workshops held by two local poets. Sally Harris Sange, Center poet-in-residence, held weekly workshops in the Glasgow studio during the entire school year for senior high school students. At the same time during the spring semester, Jeffrey Lorber, poet and actor, held workshops in the Carriage House Gallery for middle school students. Strategies suggested, whether for spontaneous or sustained responses, were designed to excite students' imaginations. In turn, their thoughts were translated to words; thereby students became involved in verbal and written articulation.

In three parts, this book, first, describes major issues discussed when poet and teachers met in workshops. The second part focuses on writing which resulted from spontaneous student responses to poets visiting one to two times in their classes. The third part deals with writing which resulted from sustained student responses to continuing workshops with poets.

A bit of explanation is now in order about the kinds of poems in this book. They do not illustrate rhymed or unrhymed verse or display poetic expertise on the part of students. Rather, they are included because of *poetic flashes that work*. In so doing, we are making an overt attempt to encourage teachers and students to write through errors and confusion to find the language that works.

The entire DIALOGUE series has had the encouragement and cooperation of many educators, institutions, local and national education systems and programs. But most important of all has been the imaginative and willing participation of thousands of students. This explains why we did not always get the same identifying information on a piece of writing. For instance, some poems have names only; while others have grade level and school as well. Many times students chose to hand in their poems without names. We have signed these poems "anonymous" wherever they appear.

Throughout the text, the Bodoni slash is used to separate exposition related to one poem from that of another. For the sake of clarity we sometimes placed the poem before the exposition.

We are especially grateful to Marguerite Gunn and Mildred Spiggle for secretarial and circulation assistance; to Samuel Banks for cover design, to Alan McLeod and Walton Beacham for support and leadership from Virginia Commonwealth University, and to the administrators of Richmond Public Schools. Special recognition goes posthumously to Henrietta Kinman, whose farsightedness as the first director of the Center, provided the support, which made the DIALOGUE series possible.

School systems participating in 1973-1974 Poetry-in-the-Schools were Richmond City, Henrico County, Chesterfield County and St. Catherine's Episcopal School.

R. L. N.

Part I—Poets and Teachers in Dialogue

To keep the imagination alive, to cultivate the ear, to know the joy or pain of discovery, to manipulate words and images—these are some of the things that we care about in the poetry-writing program. In preparation for this series of workshops with teachers and students, seven poets and one novelist were asked to demonstrate techniques and to speak from their experiences with the writing process. Thus through greater insight teachers recognize the worth of what they and their students have to say and write about.

William Jay Smith, writer-in-residence at Hollins College and recently selected for membership in the National Institute for Arts and Letters, conducted the initial workshop. Among other things, he emphasizes variety in selection and *keeping the imagination alive*. He believes that exposing children to what is good in poetry provides a sound base. Reach out to poems of all sorts and of a great variety to cultivate the ear. Let them hear poetry that ordinarily is relegated to the adult domain along with good children's poetry. In these ways students become aware of pauses and cadence. He suggests that we use quatrains and couplets. We suggest that you use selections from twentieth-century poets, such as Dabney Stuart's "The Termite" in quatrains and Robert Frost's couplets which follow.

THE TERMITE

Said the termite on pier fourteen,

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—Dabney Stuart

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THE SECRET SITS

We dance around in a ring and suppose,

—Robert Frost

Forgive, O Lord, my little iokes on Thee

—Robert Frost

FROM IRON TOOLS AND WEAPONS
to *Ahmed S. Bokhari*

Nature within her inmost self divides

—Robert Frost

It takes all sorts of in and outdoor schooling

—Robert Frost

Training the imagination is one of the most important things. For children and all "adult children" whose imagination is alive, Smith continues, *fantasy* fulfills a need for something to contrast with reality. The fact that the cow can't jump over the moon tells the child something about the real cow.

Smith suggests that we avoid the unimaginative language and sentimental drivel frequently touted as good poetry. An example of such bad poems "Somebody's Mother," a portion of which follows, is familiar to all of us.

The woman was old and ragged and gray,
And bent with the chill of a winter's day.
The street was wet with the recent snow,
And the woman's feet were aged and slow.
She stood at the crossing and waited long,
Alone, uncared for, amid the throng
Of human beings who passed by,
Nor heeded the glance of her anxious eye.

Samuel Johnson wrote the following stanza as an example of a bad poem:

> I put my hat upon my head
> And walked into the Strand
> And there I met another man
> Whose hat was in his hand.

In addition to suggesting the use of variety and fantasy, Mr. Smith had something to say about *writing as a way of discovery*. We don't know what we think until we've said it. You can find out what you think by putting it down. "I begin, not with a worked out idea, but with a vague notion, the music of something," Mr. Smith says. Poems are made of words not ideas. "With words you can put a goose in a bottle," Mr. Smith concludes.

In another vein Michael Mott, poet and writer-in-residence at Emory University, talks of *resources of language* as exploration into the complexities of communication. "We cannot create creative writers, but we can remind them of language," he says. After reading Robert Graves' "Cool Web," Mr. Mott points out that the poet discovers the language in the poem. Within this demonstration of language is contained a subtle debate about language: what language gives us and what language deprives us of. Language and education, he says, should parallel one another; language leads us into something and education leads us out of something.

Likening language to a web, in which one broken strand breaks the whole web, Mr. Mott states that we lose much when we verbalize. Language is a protective web between us and things. A good deal of the time, we do not use words to communicate. We are often defining, distancing and lying by using words. It is possible not to use language at all; watch the hands, eyes, and the rest of the body. Poets should remember that there are limitations on language. They should remember how often words lie. We use them to keep others at a distance and call it communication. We are trying to lead children out of something, but we should encourage them to keep a bit of it. Always we strive to nurture delight in

manipulation of language. Mr. Mott talks about W. H. Auden's now famous answer to the question, "How do you tell a poet?" When Mr. Auden asked a person why he wants to be a poet, he says that the person may say that he has feelings and ideas to express. But if he says, "I am fascinated with the language; sometimes I just read the dictionary," there is every chance that that person is a poet.

Like Auden, Mr. Mott thinks the strongest lesson we can teach is fascination with language. He observes that we send men to the moon and ask, "What is it like up there?" Astronauts reply, "Words fail me." We shouldn't necessarily send poets to the moon, but every person should be educated to have the language in his mouth.

As poets and writers continued their dialogue with teachers in workshops, discussion focused on two vital areas: *strategies for writing* and *development as writers*. Naturally, a large portion of the sessions with teachers, students and writers dealt with successful strategies for writing which stretch imaginations and explore the language. We will consider writing strategies first.

Stephen Dunning, professor of English education at the University of Michigan, says the reason for leading students into language play and exploration is not to make poets of them nor to generate good poems. More appropriate aims are to engage students in language play for the pleasure of it, to use games to generate language not tainted with those connotations of so much school writing: conformity, excessive concern for surface features of language, writing written in worry about judgment, and the like. A main aim is to provide an environment wherein students exercise full *control of language*—responsible for making it do things they want it to. Such environments diminish our frequent obsession with the "product" and encourage the taking of chances.

One activity that leads to chance-taking is the "pop poem." At first, Mr. Dunning assigns easy-to-remember language chunks to each of seven or eight students. (One student is given the line, "I'm hungry," for example. Another is given "Dear, don't ask directions." A third gets "I don't understand," another "Today is the first day of forever," and so

on.) Mr. Dunning "conducts" an impromptu "poem" by pointing first at one student, then at another, trying to develop interesting patterns through pace, repetitions, and "arrangement." Soon students are creating their own language chunks, imposing such "tones" as anger, fear, or joy, and conducting their own "poems." The activity moves from simple and "safe" to complex and "risky."

Mr. Mott also encourages the individual poets to read their poems by inviting them to volunteer to read, by reading some selections himself, and by suggesting that students read each others writing. "We all cheer and clap when one of us gets up to read," he says. "If we really like it, we'll jump up and down."

In quite another kind of *group effort,* Kofi Awoonor, Ghanaian poet and novelist, demonstrates a way to *collaborate when writing a poem.* He answers the students' questions about himself and Africa by having them give him words about three areas of Africa:

the Sahara	(desert)
the Wetlands	(forest)
the Nile	(river)

He places each *group of related words* in three distinct selections on the chalkboard. As students call out names, he asks them to supply descriptive words. He creates a poem by combining their words with verbs which he supplies. Then he gives student volunteers an opportunity to create a poem in the same manner.

In further discussion related to engaging students in language play, John Ciardi, poet and columnist for Saturday Review, observes that we don't have to teach students to feel. "We need to teach attitudes towards feelings," he says. We must provide opportunities so that students feel that putting words on the pages, the act of writing, is experience. They will discover that words react to each other. When providing experiences in poetry there is the constant problem of starting with material that is too difficult. Ciardi points out that light verse leaves the techniques clear. Begin with fun—read love poems—and shift to serious poetry.

Use limericks because they are fun, follow them with ballads. A ballad is a natural way of story telling, he says. Try some British *ballads,* such as the Scottish "Get Up and Bar the Door."

GET UP AND BAR THE DOOR

It fell about the Martinmas time,
And a gay time it was then,
When our goodwife got puddings to make,
And she's boil'd them in the pan.

The wind sae cauld blew south and north,
And blew into the floor;
Quoth our goodman to our goodwife,
"Gae out and bar the door."

"My hand is in my hussyfskap,
Goodman, as ye may see;
And it should nze be barr'd this hundred year,
It's no be barr'd for me."

They made a paction tween them twa,
They made it firm and sure,
That the first word whae'er shoud speak,
Shoud rise and bar the door.

Then by there came two gentlemen,
At twelve o clock at night,
And they could neither see house nor hall,
Nor coal nor candle-light.

"Now whether is this a rich man's house,
Or whether is it a poor?"
But ne'er a word wad ane o them speak,
For barring of the door.

And first they ate the white puddings,
And then they ate the black;
Tho muckle thought the goodwife to hersel,
Yet ne'er a word she spake.

Then said the one unto the other,
"Here man, tak ye my knife;
Do ye tak aff the auld man's beard,
And I'll kiss the goodwife."

"But there's nae water in the house,
And what shall we do than?"
"What ails ye at the pudding-broo,
That boils into the pan?"

O up then started our goodman,
An angry man was he:
"Will ye kiss my wife before my een,
And scad me wi pudding-bree?"

Then up and started our goodwife,
Gied three skips on the floor:
"Goodman, you've spoken the foremost word,
Get up and bar the door."

—Anonymous

Sylvia Wilkinson, novelist and writer-in-residence at Sweet Briar College, suggests several ways that encourages neophyte writers to find material for writing.

1. Write about an *embarrassing moment* from a two to five year distance, if you're young; from a five to ten year distance if you're an adult. Relate the most frightening moment to the most embarrassing moment and so on.

2. Research a place. Write it into a story. Research can also be about many things unusual things that you are interested in, such as spiders, certain flowers like wildflowers, local colorful things like how to make moonshine.

3. Deal with a character you know very little about. Take the facts you know and fill in with your imagination the missing things in physical appearance and in personality traits.

4. Write about the things you don't understand, i. e. the cousin who killed the "great blue heron" on the farm and couldn't say why.

5. Write from a point of view other than your own, i. e. write Christmas morning from the point of view of other persons in your home.

6. Use concrete words. Never use nice, beautiful, nasty or ugly. Start with an idea and write at it from the opposite. One student wrote:

> If I were a good boy
> I would not put tacks in people's chairs

7. Try comparison. Try comparing a man to a mouse:

> The teacher scurries in
> Nibbles his mustache . . .

8. Use the *"zoom" technique* that we see on television. Observe the panoramic view given on western TV shows. Notice how the photographer zooms in on a tiny scene or on one person. If you try that in your writing you can find "the universe in a grain of sand."

Writing, Miss Wilkinson observes, helps us become *aware of others.*

Another poet, Tom Weatherly, poet and columnist for Brooklyn Heights Press, underscores the zoom technique saying, "Don't take on too big a thing." He finds two assignments spark concrete images in student writing.

1. Write *haiku* concentrating on two rules, disregarding the traditional structure at first. Rule 1: Write about an image that can be experienced through eyes, nose, ears or skin. In other words, the image should appeal to the intellect in a physical way. Rule 2: The poem should indicate the season. The lines should come like a flash giving

as pure a sensation as possible. As example, he writes

Dead barn
Owl in moonlight
Don't give a hoot.

2. Write a three-line poem using the *blues* pattern in which the second line repeats the first line with slight variation. As example, he writes

One thing in the world I can't understand.
There's one thing in this world I can't understand.
That's a bowlegged woman in love with a crosseyed man.

Gloria Oden, poet and assistant professor of Humanities at University of Maryland, Baltimore County, brings *objects* into the classroom. In one instance she gives each student a piece of candy that they recognize as a fireball. She suggests that they connect the taste with something in their past. Collectively, the students write

It tastes like an orange with holes in it,
hot sauce, spices and cherries.
It feels like hard rock,
sticky, smooth and cold.
It looks like a cherry, bubble gum
a polka dot, the sun, a super ball.

On another occasion, she brings copies of well known *paintings*—Holbein's "Anne of Clives" and Holbein the Younger's "Queen Christina of Denmark." Miss Oden tells the story of Henry VIII's commission to the artists to paint these ladies and bring the paintings to him. From the paintings he chose his next wife. She asks what the students see and they respond:

one picture is close-up
one is all black and too pale
one is colorful
one is simple in her dress
one is ornate in her dress

"Which one do you think Henry VIII married?"
"Yes, Anne of Clives."

Just as an artist chooses simplicity versus ornateness, chooses vibrant colors verses pale and dark colors, so the poet chooses from the language, Miss Oden explains. As in painting you don't have to crowd your writing; you *select the words to produce the effect* you want.

Miss Oden advocates finding what to write about through the senses. "Don't you get frustrated?" she inquires. Through poetry you can write about the ugly as well as the good things you feel and see. The poem can use *ugly words*. Obscenity and vulgarity have a place in literature, she continues, but they can't be the total thing. If so, the poem is repulsive like belching. Instead the use of "ugly" words must work in the context of the subject matter in the poem.

On the contrary, she points out, a poem doesn't have to be what you feel. It can be fantasy and nonsense like Alice in Wonderland. There are childrens' poems consisting simply of sounds that we can use to suggest language manipulation, for example:

Down in the meadow
In a itty bitty poo

Not only do nonsense *models* work, but models from Indian chants and songs trigger imagination. Ask students to write imaginatively from another point of view as they model Indian chants and songs. Students from Nathaniel Bacon Middle School write:

SONG OF THE BUTTERFLY

In the coming heat
Of the day
I stood there flapping
my wings away.

—Russell R. Webb, Jr.

GOURD SONG

I make them dance those
brave men as my pebbles
goes chook-a-chook.

—Charles Woodley

GRASS SONG

I'm green, and I
Like the way the
Maidens dance on me.

—Ellen King

SONG OF A BIRD

I fly around in the
sky to feel the wind
as it goes by.

—Barbara Henderson

Earlier we referred to Tom Weatherley's suggestion for writing haiku for which he gave two rules. Mr. Dunning also had something to say and illustrate about *rule writing*. *"Rule writing* is a very rigorous exercise. It is important to establish the rules of the game," he says. "Often students should write the rules for the games they play." Here are five activities that can lead to rule writing by students.

1. Start the game RHYME with the definition of a word. The first student says, "I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with date." A classmate asks, "Is it something I use to catch fish?" The first student replies, "No it is not *bait*." Other students offer "definitions" for rhyming words—date, late, weight, mate, etc., until the secret word is discovered. (The student who guesses the secret word begins a new game.)

2. Mr. Dunning suggested that students develop a pot-pourri of words and images through word games. This collection of words, phrases, and images is called "a word hoard," in the words of Robin Skelton. After a substantial hoard is developed, over the course of time, students can return to it for nuggets and pieces that will work in new assignments. Skelton has many suggestions for creating such hoards, among them dreams and

free association. (At the mention of a single word, *purple,* one teacher in workshop wrote: lilacs, violets, petunias, grapes, plums, eggplant, Elizabeth Taylor's eyes, a heart-shaped medal of valor, and bruises.) Another illustration of word-generating technique appears in Part II under "newspaper poems."

3. Make a vertical list of letters *a* through *e*. a. calls for a verb, b. for a noun, c. for a definite article and an adjective, d. for another pair as in "c."—"only better," and e. for a noun. For example:

   a. startles, crunches, rattles
   b. geographer, popsicle, bumblebee
   c. this sad, the foolish
   d. that hypocritical, each broken
   e. bassoon, mountain, orook

   "Retrieve" the words in this order: c, b, a, d, and e. A resulting sentence might be:

   "The foolish geographer startles that hypocritical bassoon."

   or

   "This sad popsicle crunches each broken mountain."

4. Search the universe for language: textbooks, signs on the way home, the note you wrote to Polly, a message someone put on the bathroom wall, language in an insurance policy, . . . Find language that pleases you, for some reason, language *not* intended to be poetry. Arrange it on a page in a way that pleases you. (It is different language once you have arranged it.) Try in your arrangement to enhance the music (or the humor on the good images) that first attracted you to the language.
   Among rules you might adopt: a. do not use "poetic language." (This rules out advertising.) b. you must take the language in the order you

find it. You can leave out some dull or repetitive words and phrases, and you can use lines as refrain —if you find some you especially like.

Mr. Dunning used this "found poem" exercise with eighth graders in a class at Byrd Middle School. He sent one girl to find the language on the fire extinguisher in the hall: "General water to use hold upright and squeeze pin."

General/Water
to use hold
u
p
r
i
g
h
t
and squeeze
pin.

5. Write *concrete poems*. Rule: Make the language *do* what it says. Mr. Dunning gives two student examples:

BLOOD is thicker than water.

Keep in line!
Keep in line!
Keep in line!
Don't get out of step!
Keep in line!

Mr. Dunning reiterates his committment to getting students involved with writing through play and manipulation of language. The end results are almost never refined poems; the importance of such writing lies in students' taking pleasure and gaining confidence in being in control of language.

In a summarizing statement to a group of students with whom he had worked several days, Mr. Awoonor gives some general rules about writing a poem. They are an appropriate conclusion to the preceding strategies for writing.

1. *To help learn words,* try to identify all things.
2. *To give feeling and a kind of music,* join the words together.
3. *To reflect your special experience,* write the poem in your own language.
4. Arrange your poetry in a way that *others will say, "He said it for me."*

A highly sympathetic atmosphere prevailed among these poets and educators whose careers center in language. Along with sharing successful strategies for writing, several authors reflected, secondly, on factors in their *development as writers.*

In particular, Miss Wilkinson describes how she records the present in her journal and later synthesizes portions of her record in her novels. Two excerpts from Cale illustrate her translation of things past. In chapter 2, Jerome switches on his radio to hear that Chamberlain resigns as Prime Minister of Great Britain and Churchill takes over. In reality, Miss Wilkinson recalls how radios announced war during World War II by interrupting the rather light popular music of the time. "I only faintly remember that," she says. "I recreated the time by reading newspaper headlines and the almanac."

In another instance in chapter 12, Papa Lonza and Cale arrive in town an hour early to watch the lines for the Saturday morning movie featuring Superman and the Moleman, Lash LaRue and cartoons. This instance, Miss Wilkinson says, is about her own childhood—about the way five year olds spent Saturday morning at the movies seeing the serial. "If the family went away for the weekend, it was disaster. You never got caught up with the story." In both of these instances, readers of ages older and younger than the novelist will see how different their childhoods are.

Many times students' questions reflect their interest in the writer's sources for writing material. In answer to a student's question about the transfer of material from her journal to her novels, Miss Wilkinson says, "Yes, in a sense, I keep 'stuff' in the book the same as I wrote about it when I was,

say, twelve." She says the characters are the same; they grew up as she grew up. Later from a five-to-ten year perspective, you can write about them. In her first novel, for instance, there were two main characters, horses and no boys. When she grew interested in boys, she put them in the book.

"Is there some author who influenced you?" a student asks Miss Wilkinson.

"Rather than another writer, there was another person—my grandmother. She told me stories and never repeated. I wrote down the stories. Also teachers have helped although some of them hindered me. In particular, Randall Jarrell, the poet at University of North Carolina when I was there, took me under his wing and encouraged me."

When someone wonders whether Faulkner, Welty, Wolfe or McCullers hadn't influenced her, Miss Wilkinson replies that it is the subject matter—the South—that we find in hers and their novels. Many reviewers and readers don't separate the author's attitude from the subject matter.

Coming from quite another kind of background, Kofi Awoonor's *development as a writer* reflects American as well as his Third World influence. In his words he describes three stages of his poetry writing.

1. African village: "My native tongue is Ewe. I write about more basic things in my own language, about my mother and father, my brothers and sisters and the village that I was born in. This poetry comes from the songs of my people and the most important influence of my poetry came from my grandmother.

   "My own poetry started with the dirges that my grandmother sang. Poetry in the oral tradition has to do with occasions—social occasions, births, deaths. Poets in Africa are more than weavers of words; they are magicians and performers of rites and rituals.

   "A poet must have a sense of place, a home, and mine is Africa. A poet or poems is fed by this sense of place because places enclose a sense of people. Images are fed by this place. The birds

and trees are only alive in reference to the people. *Poetry is the original sound of man, the magic of his language.* The poet must recognize the power of objects inside and outside of man."

2. English/Christian education: "My twenty years in the missionary schools merged with my native background, and I became influenced by the cultural things that came with the conquest of Africa by the Europeans. I also learned the Bible. The priest would ask 'Who made you?' and I learned to reply 'God made me' because if I made no answer, my behind would be whipped. I was extremely religious as a boy. My father was baptized, but he once became angry and walked away from the church because he thought the sermon was aimed at him.

   "The festivals and rituals of my people existed along side the Christian influence. I no longer accept organized religion. In the name of the Christian God, people have done some very horrible things. But I haven't rejected the Christian idea of God. Sometimes the missionaries would come and tell us that we were all wrong, we were worshipping sticks and stones. But we don't cut down our trees and blow up our mountains. We speak to the wind to talk to God. Man must be at peace with his surroundings. He must be sympathetic and recognize others; it is important to be aware of each other. *Poetry restates our common humanity.* John Donne said that no man is an island. We are all part of the mainland."

3. England: "England was my purgatory. There I wrote poetry of nostalgia, of the sounds and smells of things in my native Africa. The sounds of the English language are not as musical as the African sounds. Of all the countries I have traveled to, China accepts poets more than any other. Poetry can be an instrument of social action, but I don't

believe in that completely. Once I was supposed to write a poem for the Chinese. It is hard to write to order. They called my room after four hours to see if I was finished.

"Now in America I come to life. Everyone writes about America; and I don't want to miss my chance. A poet has his feelings wake up in his new surroundings too. I have met many of your poets and they have become my close friends. I like your landscape; it is vibrant, alive, violent. Even your violence is a part of your humanity. But even as I write in America, I write of the place that I left."

Miss Wilkinson and Mr. Awoonor comment on the *writer as artist whose materials are words and feelings.* Miss Wilkinson says the artist as writer is not delicate; he is tough. He takes criticism from people who have no right to criticize. Yet writers never stop. They lose confidence, become discouraged; however there is a compulsion that keeps them going.

Mr. Awoonor says that along with structure there is feeling to be dealt with in a poem. He tells students that language is the vessel and feelings are poured into it. If you have no feeling, you should not try to write poetry. "Poetry must celebrate life," he says. "We must explore sounds and rhythms."

At another time, Mr. Awoonor elaborated on these two components of a poem—language and feeling. It is important that the poet or a child, at an early age, become aware of his surroundings, gives names to things. He will, then, start to create when he knows the world around him. Each person is sent into the world with his individuality. It follows that each poet or child will associate words with the world he lives in. Some children, like poets, will become aware of the world created in poetry. We might conjecture that the quality of life improves because of this awareness. Maybe. It—poetry and poets in the classroom—is not a competition but a sharing.

FORM

If you think, when we say *form,* of a document all drawn up with some blanks to be filled in (briefly) by you, your poetry shows it. Have you ever wanted to scratch out one of the questions and reword it yourself? Ever feel like taking more space than you're given, or filling up the blank space with graffiti? To use form well, you have to answer the question, but you don't have to give a stock reply.

Stanley Kunitz, the poet, says that his own preference is "for a poetry that looks fairly simple on the surface, but that moves mysteriously inside its skin." Robert Frost said that freedom is "moving easy in harness." In order to present form apparent in student-poems, we divided this section into: influence of form, rule breaking, form and content breakthrough, line break and foreshadowing.

The Influence of Form

These poems demonstrate several different forms. The forms are probably familiar—the *diamante,* a poem with *fixed rhyme* words, *blues,* a *limerick* and a *ballad.*

(Diamante)

EGG
white, speckled
slipped, smacking, crashed
hen, bluejay—dove, cardinal
moving, opening, cracking
burst, yolk
Bird

—Willie Williams,
Maggie Walker High School

The *diamante* form is obvious: one word on the first line, two on the second line, and so on. It is not fit for many subjects, but Willie's subject fits in fine. He turned something

upside-down; he balanced the words *white* and *yolk* against one another. The *symmetry* of the form helped him find the symmetry in the metamorphosis from egg to bird, with the destruction and creation that crop up in the middle.

The first two poems were by senior high school students. This next one is by a fifth-grader who was asked to write a *triplet* (three lines that rhyme).

(Fixed Rhyme)

He slammed out the door
Left a note on the shelf
No more tears on the floor
How do I go on by myself?

—anonymous

This poem was written in an even stricter form. Not only was the rhyme scheme prearranged; *the actual rhyme-words were specified: door, shelf, floor, myself.* The rhyme-words are especially good ones because they establish *a concrete, physical setting.* The poet must deal with those structures of a room, yet he is free to choose what kind of room it is. Most important, he must work a person, myself, into the poem in the last line. It would be hard to follow this assignment and keep from creating a drama. Good! The form may have prevented the poet from spinning off into an abstraction about being left alone.

(Blues)

Every day I have the blues;
Every single day I have the blues;
After I listen to the Channel 8 News.

—Robbie Robinson,
Henrico High School

In writing a *blues* poem, the poet works under these conditions: the first and second lines must be the same, or almost the same. The third and final line must rhyme with the other two. Robbie gave himself maximum leeway and varied the second line slightly to emphasize the *dailiness* of his blues. *We* begin to focus on the dailiness and wonder what could happen every day to cause such blues. The answer is in the third line: what is more daily than the Channel 8 News?

Now we come to a form that must be familiar to every reader: the *limerick*. It's not our favorite form for writing good poetry, but we can't ignore it since it was used in nearly every classroom as a beginning assignment. Can limerick-writing ever be good for a poet's development? By definition, the limerick jingles (and frequently jangles). By definition, it is light and humorous. It is often funny as a joke is funny: you "get" it and you forget it.

(Limerick)

There once was a young boy named Crocket
Who powered his bike with a rocket.
He lit up a match.
There was a kerplatch!
And all that was left was the sprocket.

—Monty Moncure, 9
John B. Cary School

Monty almost certainly invented the word *kerplatch* for the occasion of this limerick. This sort of invention is the saving grace of the form, for, if the poet felt free enough to make up a word here, he'll be ready to make up a word in a real poem where it counts.

Let's look at another poem that follows rules, "The Ballad of Hester Prynne." Susan read The Scarlet Letter for her

English class, and then tried to reinterpret Hester's story for herself, *combining the traditional literary ballad form with some aspects of the folk songs* she has heard all her life.

(Ballad)

THE BALLAD OF HESTER PRYNNE

In a market place, for all to see
Stood Hester Prynne in misery.
With a baby she was blessed,
The child held closely to her chest.

Why stands this woman here alone?
Her lover, to the town not known,
Reverend Dimmesdale, filled with shame
Hester will not reveal his name.

Hester Prynne, poor Hester Prynne,
Branded forever for her sin.
She has no hope for any better,
Her sin revealed by a scarlet letter.

Her little Pearl, she must raise
And live with same all her days
A beautiful child, in a world of woe
In the hate of Salem she must grow.

Her marriage a farce, there was no love,
This known only to God above,
Chillingworth, filled with hate,
Set out to find her secret mate.

Daily penance, Dimmesdale had.
This secret sin would drive him mad.
Hester, though, filled with shame,
Said Chillingworth was to blame.

Hester was helpful 'bout the town
Yet could not sew a wedding gown.
Little Pearl, with glowing skin,
Reminded Hester of her sin.

Hester Prynne, poor Hester Prynne,
Branded forever for her sin.
She has no hope for any better,
Her sin revealed by a scarlet letter.

His public confession finally made,
Dimmesdale is no longer afraid.
Pearl is married, she has done well,
The future for her, no one can tell.

Chillingworth, he suffered defeat,
The eyes of Hester he cannot meet.
Hester, now, this ballad will tell
In Salem town, is called Angel.

Hester Prynne, poor Hester Prynne,
Branded forever for her sin.
She has no hope for any better,
Her sin revealed by a scarlet letter.

—Susan All, 11th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

Susan's form is hardly like Hawthorne's; she has a different angle on the same story. That's what form does to content.

Rule Breaking

But what happens when the poet breaks the rules? Intentionally or unintentionally, many students practically throw off the harness or slip out of the skin.

I like to play basketball
In the new gym hall.
It's really fun
And I like to run
Although I'm not very tall.

—Jonathan Miller, 10
John B. Cary School

301

There once was a fire-breathing fellow
Whose belly was made completely of Jello.
But then came a man
with a fire-extinguishing can
And put out his fire so mellow.

—Maurice Bell, 9
John B. Cary School

You can see that these are limericks, but something is not just right. Either the rhythm is a little off, or the rhyme is a little skewed, or the line is not as long as you expected it to be. As limericks go, perhaps these are the best. They started in tight skins and loosened up. Luckily, the poets are quite young; if they are encouraged to write these "mistaken" limericks, and are not "corrected" for "misunderstanding" the form, they may develop *a ready sense of timing about when rules can be broken.* It is believed that many children cease to be creative once they discover how painful it is to generate a new idea only to be proclaimed *wrong.*

BLUES

I got to go on
I got to go on
Because there's a bull behind me with a really big horn

—anonymous
John F. Kennedy High School

The student allowed herself license to rhyme *on* and *horn.* It's not a full rhyme, but there are cetainly sounds in common. The third line of her blues poem is making fun of the mock-serious tone in the first two lines. Her consonantal rhyme (*n*) gives us a clue that she's kidding.

There once was a door
who was mad at a shelf.
He slammed him to the floor
and said, "Take that yourself."

—anonymous

Remember this form? The fixed rhyme-words were *door, shelf, floor,* and *myself.* The poet took the liberty of replacing *myself* with *yourself.* Why not? The little drama was going along fine with only the parts of the room involved. Instead of artificially including *myself,* he added a bit of dialogue: "Take that yourself!"

UNTITLED

cold quiet dawn
the slated junco has come
wavy lines of flying birds

warm quiet dawn
the slated junco has gone
return lines of flying birds

—Harrison Wickham,
Henrico High School

These are a pair of poems which imitate the Japanese *haiku* form. Haiku, proper, can only be written in Japanese. In English, we usually interpret the form in a three-line poem, each line having five, seven, and five syllables consecutively. It should present a strong image which makes us *feel* and which gives us *spiritual insight* of some kind. If we take the syllable-count seriously, these are not haiku poems. Nevertheless, they *feel* like haiku. The poet, who knew very well what he was doing, decided to forgo precision in order to present a clear, strong image.

Form and Content Now that we have seen several forms used by several different poets, we might as well say it: *it's never possible to separate form and content.* Without exception, they must work together to make a good poem. This notion, carried to its logical conclusion, has spawned *concrete poetry.*

A concrete poem *is* what it *says.* Pauline McLemore, a teacher at Maggie Walker High School, let her students write "show-off" poems. Here are three of them:

When
ever
I
feel
down
in
the
dumps
I
take
a
dee—p
breath
and
a
little
pick
up
talk
with
my
mom
who
knows
every-
thing.

—anonymous
Maggie Walker High School

To be heroic is to . . .
jump
down
off
a
building or
make a
backward
dunk
when
you
know
you
are not
L enough.
L
A
T

—Willie Williams,
Maggie Walker High School

Show-off poems have muscle flexing under the skin. They remind us that poetry is both *seen* and heard.

Bumblebee,
Fat, has a big
Sting, hurting, buzzing
Queen larva—honeybee hive
Flapping, moving, scooping
Red, smelling
Rose

—Lee Rogers,
Maggie Walker High School

This is another diamante, like the one about the egg becoming bird. Lee interpreted the form in a different way: he balanced the negative traits associated with bumblebees against the beauty of the hive, the flight of the bee, and the rose to which he is attracted.

PrIdE
I (feeling dejected) thought he WOU
LD be PrOuD of
M (most)
E
(of)
I wanted to be very HA
P
P
(my) Y (young)
but
It is practically
ImPoSsIbLe
with him near
M
(life) E
(HURTS) !!!!!!!!!!

—anonymous
George Wythe High School

This poem is a parody of the style of e. e. cummings. You wouldn't want to write about just *anything* in this form, but it certainly is good for expressing mixed-up feelings. As

cummings himself said, "feeling is first." He warned us to mistrust the feelings of a person who "pays any attention to the syntax of things." This poem is almost a duet: what is in side parentheses is one part, what is outside parentheses is another part, and the two parts together croon a wacky harmony.

TREES

Trees are
so pretty
when their
leaves are
green the
trees some-
times grow
up so high
that you
can't even
see the top.

—anonymous
John B. Cary School

The poem is not shaped like a tree, but it *is* tall. Each line (with three exceptions) has two syllables. If you pause briefly at the end of each line, it takes a relatively long time to read this "short" poem. Does it remind you of the cinematic technique of *panning,* when the camera moves slowly across a scene? How would you separate the form from the content here?

Breakthrough Scientists sometimes reveal the extraordinary circumstances that often accompany scientific breakthrough; a poet almost never does this. Language is slippery, thought is more slippery, and poetry comes at times when the two collide in the poet's mind. Mike, in his myth of the volcano, explains how *accidents nudge creation.*

THE VOLCANO

One time long ago there was a mountain that never did anything but hope. He would hope that he could walk around and talk. Then one day a man came. He said his name was Ongula. Some people called him Wise Wonder because he knew so much.

He talked to the mountain but the mountain would not answer. Ongula wondered why the mountain would not answer.

One day Ongula told the mountain he would make him talk but when the mountain tried he goofed. He spit up a bunch of rocks and hot lava. That's how the volcano came.

—Mike, 4th grade
J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School

Form may be nothing more than a launchpad. *When a poem gets carried away, it leaves the form behind.* Stanley's poem started as an "alphabet poem" about the letter *E*.

E IS FOR ENGLISH

English is like a baseball bat;
Sometimes you can hit the right word.

—Stanley White
Maggie Walker High School

Stanley had an accident (he jumped out of his skin) but he found a comparison that meant more to him than a treatise on the alphabet.

The following two poems are *acrostics*. See if you sense anything unusual about them.

Falling leaves,
All different colors,
Lightly
Leaving the trees forever.

—anonymous
Harry F. Byrd Middle School

Put-together words
Of meaning,
Enigmas
Meant to be figured out.

—anonymous
Harry F. Byrd Middle School

Although each is written in four lines as planned, a trained ear will recognize them as *transformed haiku.*

Falling leaves all dif-
ferent colors, lightly leaving
the trees forever.

Put-together words
of meaning, enigmas meant
to be figured out.

DISTRIBUTION

Rib that one has to eat
Is good
But is expensive. Soon people will eat
Bird meat. The Birds that
Sit

On branches won't like it, nor will
Son of bird. We'll get up,
Button our coats and
Strut down the sidewalk in the
Dust to kill.

—Susan Nolte's class
Thomas Henderson Middle School

An entire class collaborated to write "Distribution." They initially listed some of the smaller words they could find within *distribution.* Each list-word became the first word of a line. You can see how the poets made sense of something random through variable line length. One of the interesting accidents

in this effort is the title. It was not intended to have significance, but the poem seems to have grown into a socio-political statement advocating *distribution*.

I wish
I were a tree so when the
Leaves on other trees change,
Mine would change to.

—Sharon Tarry,
Maggie Walker High School

We have tried to standardize spelling in the poems. After all, professional writers have editors. Besides, it is unfair to the poet—particularly the young poet—to find his work "charming" or "cute" on the basis of an error which he didn't intend. It is possible that Sharon meant for the last word of her poem to be *too*. *To*, however, makes some uncommon sense here. We'll accept her version. There is another possible accident in the poem. The logical argument is: *if* I were a tree, *then* my leaves would change. The unspoken premise is this: *I have leaves (though I am not a tree). I would like to change them. Therefore, I wish I were a tree.* What a magnificent leap of the imagination!

I am a cow with a bone out of place in my nose. Whenever I want to moo, it comes out as "boo." That's how I feel about life.

I feel like a ghost going door to door on Hallowe'en, but that's one thing that's good about it. I can scare all the other cows away.

—Ben Lawes, 9 years old
John B. Cary School

Fortunately, Ben didn't know what it means, colloquially, for one's nose to be out of joint. His version is scientifically

satisfying and fresh. In his case, he didn't throw his Frostian harness. *He didn't know he had one.*

Line Break The two following poems are "found" poems. Ronald and Teresa found them in advertisements and handbooks, just as they are printed here—with one big exception: *line break*. The poets themselves decided where one line should stop and a new one should start.

SALE

Sale Mark 8
Stereo Tape
Deck 199.95
With High,
Low, On, Off,
Volume, AM
FM, AFC
Phono, Radio
Selector, Tone
Balance, Left
Right Record
Mike. . .Pause
Level, Program
Fast forward
4 pl eject,
Each eject
Manual eject
SALE

—Ronald Moore,
Maggie Walker High School

SEX ISN'T JUST . . .

Sex isn't just
Something you do.
It's something you are.
It's the whole thing of being a man

Or a woman.
It's the way you act as a man or
Woman that counts.

It's like driving a car.
It's the way you drive that counts
Whether you do it well or badly
But be sure first
You have good control of your car.
And know the rules of the road.
And where the bad curves are.

Think.
Don't do things blindly.
Know the bad curves.
Don't let people make you do stupid things
By calling you chicken.
Have the guts to be yourself and
To stick to your own way of doing
Something, once you've thought it
Through.

—Teresa Bliley,
Maggie Walker High School

Lines are broken to feature rhyme, unusual word order, repetition, or any other provocative moment in otherwise flat prose. Teresa exposed the absurdity of the analogy *sex is like driving a car*, by breaking the lines strategically.

I wish
I was a big cork
So I could stop up
All the wine and
Whisky bottles
That are not used
For a good reason.

—Wayne
Maggie Walker High School

Due to the break between the sixth and the last lines of Wayne's poem, we are allowed to believe one wish for a moment, then the wish is modified. The speaker-as-cork doesn't want to stop up *unused* bottles; he wants to stop up *abused*

bottles. The last line strikes the reader as afterthought, which makes for gentle social criticism.

Below is a kind of prose poem where linebreak counts. At the end of lines two and eleven, Denise has her readers at the edge of their seats.

THE SOUNDS AND PICTURES OF A NEW WORLD

First comes the cymbals then the
drums, then both of them together. Booom
a new world appears. The New World is a
lot. It is filled with glass, boulders,
grass and dirt. Ballet dancers do
twirls across the lot. Each dancer
does a twirl at the crash of a cymbal.
Then suddenly the music gets louder,
booooooommmm, crash, rrrrrrr
goes the drum and then the dancers
fade away and the new world
disappears.

—Denise
Tuckahoe Middle School

Fore-shadowing

Foreshadowing is a technique that most of us associate with fiction. A writer subtly prepares his reader for an event that will happen later in the narrative. *Forshadowing is used for warning as linebreak is used for surprise.*

The second line of Meg's poem below ("I wish I were home"), in combination with the first line about the moon, casts a long shadow over the rest of the daydream. All that follows is a wish colored by the mood of nostalgia. *Foreshadowing is nothing more than a decision about order.* What is the appropriate time to introduce each element of a poem or story?

DAYDREAMS

the moon is in a strange place—
I wish I were home
to see that inlet landscape
the water eddying around the
brown,
dying
marsh grass

to hear the grating cackle of a blue heron
the squawk of a snowy egret

to sit and watch the oysters spit
see the fiddler crabs
scurrying,
digging,
waving to each other with their oversized claws

to walk the beach road
listening to the waves
crumble,
slide,
where soon there will be
burning bodies

to sit in the cove, hearing the ocean behind me
smelling the air,
fresh,
salty,
watching the lazy clear pool
before me
minnows self-important in
the shallows
crabs' green slow-motion hunting,
staring at me as they continue their
sideways journey

—Meg Mansfield,
St. Catherine's School

Mythmaking, as you can see in Mark's story, demands a good sense of order. In both Meg's poem and Mark's myth below, the writers' basic intentions are revealed at the outset.

HOW THE SPIDER BECAME A SPIDER

Once there was a little voice going around saying, "Don't step on me." Then one day a little boy said, "Where are you, Spider?" The boy just took a wild, wild guess, and he said, "On your shoulder." Then the boy said, "I can't see you" and bought some clay and rolled some up and said, "Tell me if it's too big." And the spider said, "Just right," so he made the other three legs. The boy made a body and a head for him and said, "Now I can see you" and painted him black and that's the story of*How the Spider Became a Spider.*

—Mark, 4th grade
J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School

WHAT THE DRUG PUSHER SAID TO A TEENAGER WALKING DOWN THE STREET

"Dope?"
"Nope."

—Ronald Moore,
Maggie Walker High School

Ronald reveals nothing but the dramatic situation in his long title. We have no clue what the poet's attitude toward the situation is until the poem—the dialogue—is over.

The following is an "excuse" for not writing a poem. The most exciting part of the excuse, of course, is the fight with the tiger, but Danny began by telling us that he can't write upside-down. *He saved the best for last.*

Because I can't write up-
side down and the reason
I was upside down was
Because I was in a fight with
my tiger and he turned me
upside down.

—Danny Wurtzel, 5th grade
John B. Cary School

The next two poems begin with strong dramatic situations which generate the events of the poems. Ellen's "Self-Portrait in Another Mood" is an exercise in *following one image as far as it will go.*

So enticing was the kitchen door,
Even now so the kitchen shelf
But alas! he slid on the polished floor
And was discovered by the maid herself.

—anonymous

SELF-PORTRAIT IN ANOTHER MOOD

I live as a piece of wood held forcefully in a vice.
Warping, bending, splitting with creaks of pain heard only by my splintering mind.
I try desparately to escape.
But the vice turns once more—tighter, closer.
My own thoughts compressed; all ideas for the closing vice.
But the vice does not see. The vice does not know.
Turn, vice, turn.
Turn with no thought until the wood cracks,
And falls easily to the floor.

—Ellen Miller, 11th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

By now, we hope that form is becoming less the printed document and more the arrangement of free possibilities. We hope you admire the horse, not the harness. When you do, something begins to stir inside the skin.

Pattern

Repetition Let's make a fine distinction. Form and pattern are not the same. *A pattern is something that keeps happening:* form already happened. Divisions in this section consider repetition, cataloguing, rhyme, rhythm, recurring images and tone. The simplest pattern of all is the *repetition of a word or a group of words.* In prayer, we often establish

this simple pattern: "May the Lord . . ." and, later, "May the Lord . . ." At the end of the prayer, we say "Amen"—not as a part of the prayer's pattern (there is never more than one *amen* per prayer) but as part of its form. We knew before we started that the prayer would end in *Amen.* While "May the Lord . . ." keeps happening, "Amen" happens once.

A blues poem, like Elaine's, includes line-repetition (a pattern) as part of its form. Two consecutive lines, the first and the second, are the same. In Elaine's poem, the *repetition creates suspense:* where does the speaker love to go? The funny thing about repeating a line is that *it makes the line seem more important;* otherwise you wouldn't say it so many times.

BLUES

I love to go
I love to go
But the thing that bothers me is the traffic too slow.

—Elaine Burrell, 10th grade
John F. Kennedy High School

In the poem that follows, Keith seems to have caught himself in the trap of making farms seem more exciting than he truly believes they are, merely by saying *farms, farms* over and over.

What's on the farm?
cows, chickens, everything
What's on the farm?
pigs, dogs, sheep, everything.
Farms, farms are so much fun,
but nobody would like to live on one.

—Keith Alston, 10 years old
John B. Cary School

MY ROOM WHEN I GET SPANKED

I hate to argue
it makes me sad
something my mommy I say no to
and she calls me very bad
then I get spanked too
oh I hate to argue

—anonymous
J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School

When the first and last lines of a poem are the same, as in "My Room When I Get Spanked," the poem seems to delineate a total world with strict borders. That's why the title is striking. The room itself is not mentioned within the poem but is created by it.

THE RAT

Up down all around
that's the way the rat goes.

He doesn't use a wash cloth
he uses all his toes.

When he's sleeping he curls
up in a ball but when he is
awake he really does it all.

So up down all around
here there everywhere
that's the way the rat goes.

—Jeremy Fowler, 10
John B. Cary School

Jeremy, though his mood is entirely different, has delineated a "word" in a similar way. He extended the original line as a finish. He sounds definitive—an authority on "the way the rat goes."

RAIN

All I do is fall and water
All the fields that have been scattered.

—anonymous
St. Catherine's School

This little poem is prayerlike because of the repetition of *all* at the start of each line. You can see that the word changes: in the first line, it minimizes the importance of the rain (that's *all* I do); in the second line, it maximizes rain's power to fall on everything (the other *all*).

The following poem was written by a teacher who became a student for awhile in Stephen Dunning's workshop. She "found" this poem—guess where!

WHO?

Who?
is responsible
for all
material
taken
on
this
card
Which
must be presented
When
withdrawals are
made
from
the
Henrico
County
Public
Library
Who?

—Elsie Pelfrey
Middle School English Coordinator
for Henrico County

Catalogue The technique of catalogue—listmaking—is a *repetition of kind* rather than of word. Homer's famous catalogue of ships is the first we know about. Listen in on the modern American poet, William Carlos Williams, in an excerpt from Paterson, as he responds to an interviewer about catalogue:

Q. . . . here's part of a poem you yourself have written:

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A. Yes. Anything is good material for poetry. Anything. I've said it time and time again.

Without further comment, we present Rob's *cinquain*. (He has redefined the form slightly. Instead of five lines with two, four, six, eight, and two syllables respectively, his poem has five lines with one, two, three, four, and one word respectively. Fair enough.)

Brown
buckskin, Alamo
quiver, stock, hartwood
brown sugar, molasses, beaver
wood

—Rob, 4th grade
J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School

A *diamante* is good for catalogue:

Rain
wet, cold
dripping, flooding, soaking
water, ice, sleet, drops
freezing, slushing, sleeting
white, light
snow

—Tonia Brice,
Maggie Walker High School

In "Yellow," a catalogue of all the *things* yellow can *be* saves the poem from abstraction. Color, an abstract phenomenon, is made concrete.

YELLOW

I am yellow, I beat through the blue.
I cuddle up babies and make them happy, too.
I am light, I am delicate.
I am the color of the midnight moon,
The color of a four-year-old's room.
I am a crown painted a delicate gold.
When it comes to lemon, I am very BOLD!
You can touch me and pinch me, but you won't feel a thing.
I, yellow, am the color of an angel's ring.

—Dora Daniel, 9
John B. Cary School

THE CLOSET TRUNK

In the closet we have a trunk,
A special place for all our junk.
We have many things like:
Old rusty screws from the wheels on the bike,
A broken snowscraper that doesn't work,
An old coffee pot that still won't perk,
Another old collar of the cat's,
My brother's old baseballs and bat,
The unused windup clock,
An old moth-eaten single sock,
Overcoats for the rainy season.
Today there is one special reason
For not cleaning it out—
We might get LOST!

—Margaret Rennolds,
St. Catherine's School

This is a glorified catalogue. By mentioning special attributes of the junk in the trunk, Margaret holds our interest. In the next "excuse," Jacqueline catches the spirit of excuses by using a catalogue of names as a stalling technique.

WHY I DID NOT WRITE MY POEM

I did not write my poem because Friday when I got home I went upstairs and I wanted to go in my bathroom to take a bath but the bathtub was not there.

I called the lady next door. I called my uncle in Texas, an aunt in New York, the fire department, the telephone company, Michelle, Mary, Marlene, Marian, Rita, Robin, Delores, Gwen, Debra, Lisa, Tammy, Angela, Linda, and Mrs. Bell. Then I made a nervous cheese sandwich. I was curious to get my tub back, I was so nervous. I grew to eight foot nine in two minutes. I got back to normal in two hours. By that time it was 8:30 and we had to get a new tub and that is why I didn't write my poem.

—Jacqueline Harris,
West End Elementary School

Rhyme Our most notable debates in teacher workshops focused on rhyme. Should we *make* students rhyme? Should we *let* students rhyme? The first thing to do is to expand your notions of rhyme. *When one sound makes contact with another, the two are rhyming.* John Logan is one of America's best contemporary rhymers, as you can see for yourself in this small selection from his poem "Carmel: Point Lobos":

They wait along the brilliant *height,*
same vowel sound; different consonant

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nebulae of froth along the *blue black* water.
same initial sounds

We've pointed out five *different* kinds of rhyme in only eleven lines. There is no example of absolute, clanking, perfect rhyme in any of the end-words. There are all kinds of slippery patterns, though—not just among end-words, but among all the words.

Many teachers have decided to share this expanded notion of rhyme with their students. Then they let their students decide: rhyme if you want, but don't force it. Some bad poems seem to have been written solely for the rhyme. Don't let that happen to *your* poem. And use all kinds of rhyme, as Logan did.

Let's look at some poems where rhyme went right.

ART

Art is a part of doing things
like making egg cartons and diamond rings.

—anonymous
J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School

It's a couplet—full rhyme, plus internal rhyme (*art*—*part*—*cart*-ons). What the poet is saying is "Gee, art encompasses all kinds of disparate activities." He has yoked together diamonds and egg cartons, and one way he keeps them stuck together is by the cohesive force, the pattern of the rhyme.

Out went humor, flying through the door
Bitterness was stuck on the shelf
Negative nature lay down on the floor
What was left was a bit of myself

—Ginny Muñez
St. Catherine's School

Here is a poem about abstractions: humor, bitterness, negative nature. These airy concepts are anchored down by the heavy rhyme of words. They keep the poem from floating away.

In the next poem, rhyme also holds like an anchor. It holds down the end of each line, making the speaker's tone matter-of-fact. This causes a strong tension, since the speaker is matter-of-fact about a situation in which she has no power. Tension in poetry, unlike tension in life, is good. It works like the tension among particles that keeps an atom intact.

HOME

Our house is small.
That's all we've got.
If the man told us to move,
I'd rather not.

—Linda Thomas, 10th grade
George Wythe High School

The next poem fascinates us. There is an intricate *interlocking rhyme scheme* that, planned or unplanned, reveals a poet with a well-tuned ear for language.

When it rains the day
is no fun. They say

oh no here comes another
one.

look at the sky look
at the clouds why do

they scream so loud.

another one of those
days.

—anonymous
John F. Kennedy High School

In order to emphasize the rhyme-words, we transform it:

When it rains the day	a
is no	b
fun.	c
They say	a
oh no	b
here comes another	d
one	c
look	e
at the sky	f
look	e
at the clouds	g
why	f
do they scream so loud.	g
another	d
one	c
of those days.	a

Sallie used eye-rhyme: it looks the same but it sounds different:

I hate to cough it
is so rough to all
night long cough,
cough, cough,

—Sallie Cecil,
St. Catherine's School

Finally, let's look at a poem that makes patterns out of the whole spectrum of sound. This is subtle sophisticated rhyme and is also a catalogue of sorts. Cheryl began with a list of words that reminded her of Africa. You have to say this one out loud to release its magic. Listen for the pattern of *r* sounds and the relief from them at the end. Poet Kofi Awoonor helped Cheryl with this.

the nomads ride the barges
in Egypt on the edge of the Sahara
where there were no trees or farmers
the nile river
by the oases never saw
the mahogany of the forest
in Ghana where there there are no pyramids
and the monkey is king

—Cheryl
Maggie Walker High School

Rhythm As long as we're thinking about rhyme patterns, we may as well turn to that other staple of poetry: *rhythm*. Certain rhythms recall for us certain literary traditions. If you think that's esoteric, try this poem out on anyone you know:

PANTS

A pair of pants is really a bug
With two long legs and a mouth.
It eats you no matter how loudly you yelp
And buckles you up with a belt.

—Paula Harlfinger,
St. Catherine's School

What is it about those last two jingling lines? The poem is not a limerick, but the last two lines have the rhythm of the last *three* lines of a limerick. Lacking the obvious signals, linebreak and rhyme, we still sense a limerick pushing through.

ON THE HILL

A cow bellowing in the wind
the cold night turns to
morning
the stars in my mind fade . . .
awakening to the steady drone
of a voice
in familiar sounds
of regulation size.

—Trich Kruza,
St. Catherine's School

Trich's poem is so-called *free verse*. There is no regular meter. However, the last five words ("familiar sounds of regulation size") were written in iambic pentameter, the meter used by Shakespeare and many other traditional English-speaking poets. Suddenly, in those last few words, we become aware of a formality and structure. The rhythm reinforces the observation that the sounds are familiar (so is the rhythm) and of "regulation size."

Iambic meters can break the mood of a limerick. The last line of the following poem is the only line that strays from the usual limerick pattern. It returns us to the pomp surrounding that preacher.

There once was a preacher named Quinn
Who didn't know quite how to swim.
He fell in the lake
Before he could take
Collection and a hymn.

—anonymous
Harry F. Byrd Middle School

Sometimes an extra stressed syllable in a line will change the tone. Nancy's poem has two stresses in each line except the last two. In that couplet, she turns from objective description to warning.

A PLACE

Have you ever been
In a large violin
Where it's gloomy and dark
And not like a park?
There isn't much room
To sweep with a broom,
And you better watch your nose
Because the case will close.

—Nancy Brown,
St. Catherine's School

Recurring Images

Another pattern to consider is the pattern of images. What does a poem make us *see, hear, smell, feel, taste?* Are all the images related in some way, or is the reader expected to jump around from one world to another? *The best poems either keep us in one well-made world or provide the transportation necessary in getting from one world to another.*

You wept when I wrote
I no longer am inspired
By dying oak leaves.

—Anonymous

Haiku poetry is notable for its imagery. Usually, as in the preceding poem, the poet juxtaposes two seemingly disparate images—two seemingly different worlds—and lets us reconcile the two. As Archibald MacLeish has said, the two images are left "to mean if they can."

PRISON

Squares upon squares upon squares,
Overlapping each other;
Surrounding me, holding me
In, as I scream for freedom.

—Cherie Cramer, 12th grade
George Wythe High School

In a poem of great emotion, it sometimes helps to use unemotional imagery. The geometric orientation of Cherie's poem tenses against the scream in the last line.

The images are well-controlled in "The Sycamore Ball." In the first sentence, we are told that the sycamore ball is (like) a frozen explosion. Harlan doesn't leave us in that world and jump to another. He talks about shrapnel and the core. In other words, *he follows through with his original vision.*

THE SYCAMORE BALL

It's an explosion that was frozen
just after ignited.
Its shrapnel and edges all flew out
with symmetry.
But were caught just before letting
loose of the middle.
The core,
Its points all are sharp and fell
from a tree.
It's so beautiful so perfect and
round.

—Harlan McMurray
Thomas H. Henderson Middle School

SPRING CHICKEN

The red-brick egg
That has held me for all 17 years of my baby-blue existence
Has begun to crack.
Most days
I lie on my back and kick at the walls
To show that I'm really tired of the old places and faces.
But sometimes, when nobody's looking—
I run for my Elmer's glue to paste back the pieces of a world
that I know.
Though I say I'm yellow-happy about the whole thing,
I'm really gray-afraid.
Because I know
That come Spring
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Won't put my old world together again.

—Jeni Dilworth
St. Catherine's School

Jeni created a *world of colors and eggs* and stayed in it. *Fantasy-writing is good for practicing controlled imagery.*

Sherry wanted to do something that is nearly impossible. She listened to part of the rock opera "Tommy" and tried to say, in words, what was happening in music. She chose, wisely

we think, to anchor abstraction in heavily anthropomorphized image. And she never forgot which world she was in.

The drum is running
from the guitar in a
big open field. The
guitar is running fast
but the drum is running
faster. As they run they
pass a tambourine and a
cymbal. The guitar has
caught up with the drum
now and they're running
together. But they have
split up again and the
guitar is being chased
by the drum. They are
tired and have started
to walk to a different
place.

—Sherry
Tuckahoe Middle School

Sandra's poem is fairly straight forward narrative. It is the third line which delights us, being pure image (sound.) It is the prototype for the visual images, all related in mood. ***Remember that poetic image can represent any of the five senses.***

THE BEACH

Water rushing on the rocks
singing as they do
cush cush cush
People surfing
on the quiet water
couples running on
the sand always
hand in hand
Children with their
sand buckets and shovels
Father bringing in
fish by the huddles,
Mother cooks the
fish by open fire.

—Sandra L.
Tuckahoe Middle School

Tone The other pattern-aspect that interests us in the children's poetry is that of *tone*. Sustaining a certain tone is difficult for all writers, and is especially difficult in a long poem. As you might expect, the student poems with tonal integrity were often short ones. In fact, one of the best handled techniques was *understatement*. To give a couple of lean examples:

WHAT A FATHER WOULD TELL HIS SON IF BEING ROBBED

Run
Son.

—Willie Williams
Maggie Walker High School

A PERSON WHO SEES A PERSON STREAKING SAYS:

"Nude
Dude."

—Anonymous
Maggie Walker High School

The poems were specifically written as "short poems with long titles."

Here is a simple image that has a distinctive tone (smiling, dancing):

SIGN LANGUAGE

Smiling fingerprints dancing on knuckles.

—Ellen Miller, 11th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

ME!

I come from Lacamanion. I was Miss Saturn and won the Beauty Award from Mr. Venus who soon after became my husband. We have eight children: Pluto, Venus, Jr., Mars, Moon, and Jupiter. Some are missing. I am in a hurry to go to Space Shopping Center for their twice-a-century sale on garbage cans and a new lizard.

—Melody Barnes, 9 years old
John B. Cary School

You can't help but grin at Melody's easy dismissal of the other three kids: "Some are missing." Then on to garbage cans and the new lizard. Miss Saturn is assuredly a scatterbrain, and remains so throughout.

EXCUSE

my chicken pecked it
up

—James
John B. Cary School

It's a tiny poem—an excuse James wrote for not handing in a poem. Slight as it is, it shows us something about our language. *Pecked up* is really one word, even though it is written as two. It's like *used up*. (A *used* car is fine, but watch out for the one that's used *up*.) After reading the first line, we expect maybe a hole in the paper. *Up*, with its abrupt sound, gives us the sure ring of finality that clenches the whole matter. The poem is inexorably gone.

Limericks can be tonally complex. Here are two:

There was a young fellow named Tharp
Who swallowed a live, full-sized carp.
He did struggle and gasp—
Now when people ask
They say he is playing his harp.

—Susan Nalle, 11th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

There was a man named Lemon
who loved to kiss women.
One day he kissed Kate
and made her his mate.
The following day he went swimming.

—Gail
John B. Cary School

In the first one, we sense the poet's contempt for those who ask Tharp, "What's wrong?" He didn't *say* he was contemptuous, he just gave an absurd reply. In Gail's limerick, the reader is ridiculed for paying such close attention to Lemon's activities, and the whole subject of romance is depreciated. How is it done? *by the simple balance of parallel construction:* one day *x* happened (wow!); and one day *y happened* (so what?).

GIRAFFE

tiny, black, shiny, short
you can't see it
either: moves very fast
and also can swim
but it doesn't stay black
it changes color also.

—Anonymous
J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School

"Giraffe" is a "lie" poem, as you can see. It's the most delightful kind of lie: one piled up on another. First we're told the giraffe is black, then that it changes color! The cover-up lie is bigger than the original. The tone throughout is measured, underplayed. It's a straight face with a chuckle trying to surface.

Design

Form and pattern together determine the design of a poem. But what about the designer? What's he doing? Is he looking or relooking at something? How does he see? What makes him think he has something to say? His resources are not unique—everybody has words! What *may be different about the poet himself* is the subject of this last section. We've divided it into the following sections: *sensing, metaphor, persona, word play, cliché,* and *discovery.*

Sensing The next poem, Cornell's, looks at an abstraction in sensory terms. *Hatred* is made immediate and vivid; the punch is put back into a word that had lost its punch over the years.

Hatred sounds like being hit in the jaw.
Hatred feels like cuts on your face.
Hatred looks like something you say.
Hatred tastes like eating at anybody's place.
Hatred smells like nothing right.
Hatred is being ready to fight.

—Cornell Jones
Maggie Walker High School

Can you tell that the next two poets were responding to the same stimulus? Assisting Poet J. Christie Cruger had them lie down, close their eyes, and follow her instructions. Then she led them through some sensitizing exercises, designed to make them *feel* the silence and the dark of their condition. The technique of *visual block* (closing the eyes) helped them sense with their other four senses. In Elaine's phrase "prints of cold," the sense of sight and the sense of touch mingle. Alan's poem is tiny but packed.

The gritty feel of the floor on my back.
My greenish-yellow world closed in around me.
Total silence; broken only by a high-pitched voice.
My dry mouth

—Ricky Copler
J. R. Tucker High School

It's cold in here
and deathly still.
Mausoleum quiet.
The air covers me
like an icy cobweb.
Invisible spiders slowly
step
foot
by foot
by foot
limbs mechanically moving
like cogs in a wheel
by foot
across my face
down my arm
leaving prints of cold
and drop
splashing
on the dry bedrock
damp and slippery.

—Elaine Klatt
J. R. Tucker High School

THE ROSE

A small clump of crumpled red velvet.

—Alan Moorefield, 11th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

It presents a rose as crumpled velvet. Reach out and touch it—it feels like velvet. But listen—roll the *rs* and *ls* and *ms* around in your mouth. It even *sounds* like velvet being crumpled!

The next poem, by Cherie, takes a friendly attitude toward mistaken identity. We get the feeling that Cherie didn't really mind. She appreciates the squirrel's affinity for her colors and textures.

Quite by accident as I hung from a tree,
A small gray squirrel took a bite out of me;
Perhaps mistaking my nutty brown skin
For a smooth hard nut, and thought we were kin.

—Cherie Cramer, 12th grade
George Wythe High School

Metaphor Once you've felt, seen, heard, smelled, and tasted—you may want to compare. JoAnne's poem vacillates between direct sensory observation and *metaphor*.

HAND EYE HAIR

Her hand feels rough in
some places and smooth
in other places.
Her eye looks wet
and like she had just
got out of a pool.
Her hair feels frizzy
like a puppy dog's tail
or a horse's tail.
Her ear looks like
a circle going round and round.

—JoAnne Crick
John B. Cary School

Sometimes metaphor is *implied*. Gently, in his poem, Danny reminds us that death is a long sleep; that sleep, like the frog, sits waiting on the edge of death.

FROG

Sitting on the water's edge
Drearily falling asleep
It died by morning.

—Danny Wurtzel, 5th grade
John B. Cary School

THE WATERMELON

Watermelon is like a fig,
It's sweet and good.
It's big and fat
Like a Mexican hat.
It's very juicy like a tubful of water.
It only cost a couple of quarters.
And if you do not like it
You can come and see me.

—Barbara Petty's Class, 5th grade
Franklin Elementary School

Ms. Petty's class wrote "The Watermelon" when poet Gloria Oden visited. Do you remember how Homer used metaphor? He would compare one thing to another, even if the two had only one small aspect in common. The series of comparisons in this poem reminds us of that. At the end, we conclude that a watermelon is indeed like many things. "And if you do not like it/You can come and see me."

Donald's poem, which follows, says "the sky is our enclosing protector," but it doesn't say it that way. How much better to be a poet-designer and say:

THE SKY

An envelope that lets us live.

—Donald Johnson, 11th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

Persona Sometimes the writer inhabits bodies other than his own and looks through "its" eyes. The four writers that follow exhibit profound empathy in some cases. Sometimes they slip back into their own bodies, looking *at* instead of *through*.

CIGAR

ooooh that's hot
I don't like him at
all; first he started
me with a match then
he started sucking on
me and started to burn
me up. I'm so embarrassed.
I feel like I did
something wrong and
now I'm being punished
for it.

—Anonymous
John B. Cary School

UNTITLED

If I were a flower
I would bloom as fast as I could.
And I would try to get water
three times a week.
Would you like to get water
three times a week?

—Ashley Scott, 5th grade
Franklin Elementary School

I AM A NEW HIT RECORD

I have just been placed on the turntable of a record player. I am getting dizzy and a sharp needle is coming fast. It is on me. It doesn't hurt at all and a loud sound is coming out of the record player. I am being played at a hit party that a beautiful, intelligent, blond girl named Rhanna Kidwell is having. A green-haired girl named Sharon Wurtzel has just jumped up on the dinner table and is stepping in the baloney. She just jumped off the table and is dancing with a short man with a crewcut whom she calls "My Man." She is throwing a hot dog across the room and a pretty girl named Deborah Wallof is painting. Now, Sharon is throwing a hot dog at me, and CRASH!

—Rhanna Kidwell, 9 years old
John B. Cary School

CROSS-EYED JACK-O-LANTERN

I may be cross-eyed, but I have 20/20 vision, and as soon as the two of you sit down, I'll tell you what Halloween looks like to me. Thank you for sitting down, all seven of you. Now see those two ghosts out there? They are both doing the same thing. I'd better get some Alka-Seltzer because I think that last candle I had gave me heartburn. Thanks, all eighteen of you, for listening.

—Jeremy Fowler, 10 years old
John B. Cary School

We are shocked by the two ways chickens are presented in Maria's diamante. We all know that chickens are farm animals, and we know that they are food, but we usually separate the two roles when we think about them. Maria forces us to see the same object from *two points of view at the same time:* she forces us to be both animal-watchers and consumers.

Chickens
fluffy, noisy
scratching, clawing, squawking
good with dumplings
Chickens

—Maria Bristow, 11th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

Word Play The late W. H. Auden believed there was always hope for a person who likes to "hang around words and overhear them talking to one another." That person has a better chance of becoming a poet, he said, than the one who simply "has something important to say." *A riddle* is a familiar way of playing around with words. William Jay Smith points out that the riddle is a *natural linguistic process:* we gather data on an object, then we name it. A riddle is the opposite of a dictionary definition.

They say I'm a liar,
For I can make the tiniest letter
Grow ten times higher.
(a magnifying glass)

—Bobbie Serrano
St. Catherine's School

Riddle-makers surprise us because they notice things that are "nonfunctional"—things we quit looking at unless we are makers. (A poet is a maker with words). While most people think of tape recorders solely in terms of their function sound, Doug concentrated on the visual experience in his first two lines.

TAPE RECORDER

Long and brown, I roll
Back and forth in my play;
Secretly I listen,
Mimicking all who speak.
Important is my memory
For I must not forget.
Indignant investigators have accused;
My master defiantly denies.
All turn to me to settle matters,
But silent I remain.

—Doug Whiting, 12th grade
George Wythe High School

The following poem is supposed to be a *definition*. As it turns out, it may be the most contorted riddle of all. The poet plays around with two meanings of *bows*.

BOWS

Bows are not arrows
Which can't be tied
But that is not the reason why.

—Anonymous
J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School

Doug, who also wrote the tape recorder riddle, plays around again in "The Grave-Digger." He wrote the poem as a parody of Chaucer's style, and he used *pun* in a more conventional way than the "Bows" poet.

THE GRAVE-DIGGER

A grave-digger there came, of lowly birth,
Yet a splendid fellow, quite down to earth.
His clients had been patients of the physician:
They were laid to rest in a prone position.
His tools consisted of shovel and spade—
Also an ax with a very sharp blade.
The clothes he wore were all covered with mud
And splotches of what appeared to be blood,
But none of the pilgrims for certain could tell
For not a soul ventured near him because of the smell.
His temper when drinking became quite a wonder.
Sometimes he'd vow to put us all six feet under.
While traveling he watched the countryside a lot,
Often remarking, "Would this not be a scenic plot?"
The ground his shovel attacked with some vigor,
A pilgrim unique was this fine grave-digger.

—Doug Whiting, 12th grade
George Wythe High School

Clichés Don't use a cliché. Don't use a cliché, Don't use a cliché. Everybody knows that. Poets know, however, that it's all right to use a cliché *as long as you* really use it. The poet must either release the original metaphor so that it is new again or find a new meaning in the old words. *Killing time* is a familiar cliché. To hear the phrase is seldom to be cognizant of the violence implied in it. Robert Lowell helps to revitalize the cliché in his poem "The Drinker."

Robert Lowell and his contemporaries use clichés all the time. In one poem, Lowell wrote "they blew their tops and beat him black and blue." Such an old hat requires a good hard head to sit on. The rest of the poem—its images and language—have to buttress its use.

Natalie, in the riddle which follows, started with a cliché and ended with a fresh vision.

> What is big and tall
> Or little and small
> And never thinks about anything?
> What is brown and green
> Or red and black
> And provides materials for everything?
> What has so many arms that you
> Can't even count them?
> And the number of fingers is infinite.
> What has just one leg
> But the set of its toes. . .
> Well, the size would make you faint?
>
> (a tree)
>
> —Natalie Bocock
> St. Catherine's School

As Jonathan was *cataloguing* all the joys of Christmas, he found a new and unusual object to add to his list. He introduced the object with a cliché that startles us with new meaning.

A school vacation,
    My friends,
Our Christmas tree,
    A fire in the fireplace,
Christmas Day,
    A hot roast turkey,
An advent wreath for our table,
    White snow to play in,
Presents for me,
    The fun of giving,
And last but not least,
    My poem.

—Jonathan Miller, 10 years old
John B. Cary School

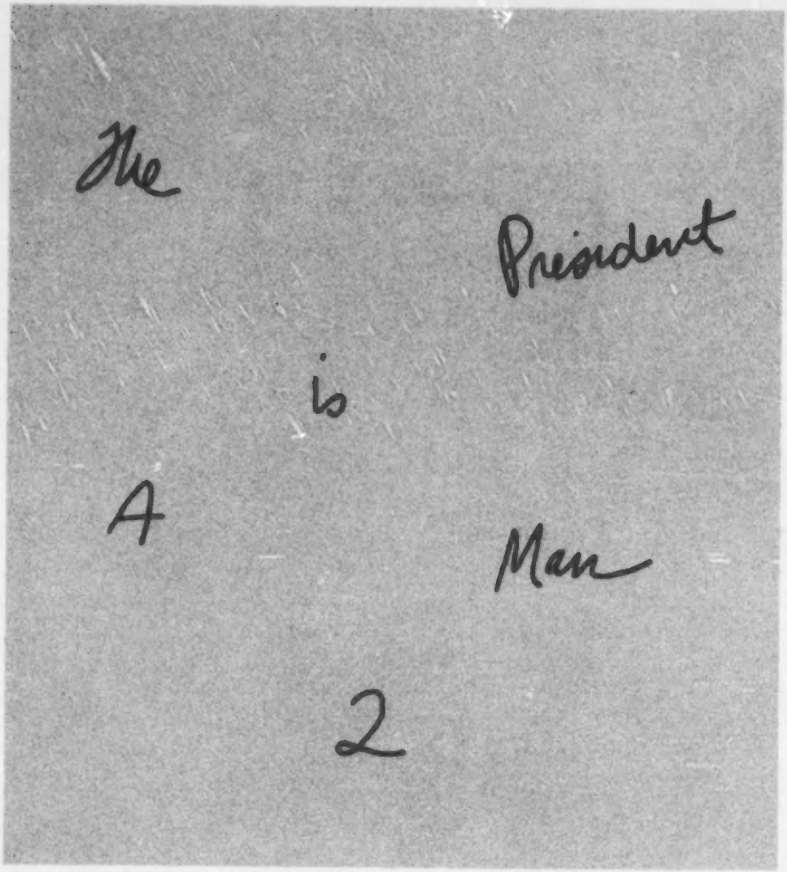
How many people imagine night*fall* anymore? Where is night supposed to fall anyway? Patty helps us see again the image behind the cliché.

PURPLE

Purple is a violet against a
Dead tree.
Purple is something you can't
Always see.
Like when the night falls through
To mix with the bright blue.
'Twill be there to mix with the
Air.
To mix silence against the sky.
Purple is a question of why, why, why.

—Patty Quynn, 9 years old
John B. Cary School

Finally, we include a newspaper poem—a special product of the Watergate era, though it is, in some sense, a classic. We are only men. We all make mistakes. The President is a man, too. What, though, is the tone of that cliché when *too* is changed to 2?



—Teresa Bliley
Maggie Walker High School

Discovery Robert Frost, a methodical man, was fond of proclaiming the insufficiency of mere method. "No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader." He is said to have loved best those poems that came easily to him, which unfolded as his pen moved across the page. "Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting." *Where does that put the designer?* It seems to us that the designer is the one who must keep the ice from sliding off the stove—no easy task! In the last poems of this section, we have a feeling that the poet is making discoveries and being surprised by himself along the way. As readers, we share the discovery.

FANTASY

There's a man at the ocean
Says he's found himself.
At night
He plays his fiddle for
Mermaids in the sea.

—Anonymous

The two poems that follow demonstrate two sides of discovery: sometimes animate beings seem like inanimate objects, and sometimes objects appear to be alive.

THE BEETLE

A tiny frying pan with legs

—Lesli Trainer, 11th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

DICE

I'm white with black dots
And I jump up in the air
I have six sides
And bring bad and good luck—
Beware!

—Brenda Greenberg
St. Catherine's School

When Natalie started her self-portrait in the poem below, she wrote all the unusual descriptions: *I go to school, my arms match,* etc. In effect, she was saying, "Look how normal I really am." The signature of the poem is the image of the "little, teeny elbows." What a strange thing to notice about oneself! How stunning to think that they "hardly ever grow"! We already knew that, of course, but *we needed a poet to let us know we knew.*

MYSELF

I am short and thin,
Have bones within
Which muscles are attached to.
I go to school
And swim in pools;
I always have something to do.
I have long, thin fingers
And short fat toes
And arms that match each other.
I have brown, straight hair
That goes everywhere
And legs that are like twin brothers.
I have a mouth that opens wide
With a tongue inside
And crooked, irregular teeth.
I have little, teeny elbows
That hardly ever grow;
Yep, that is surely me.

—Natalie Bocock
St. Catherine's School

In every case—not just in the last fantasy poems but in most of the poems included in this anthology—the poet was learning something about language, or about himself, or about the rest of the world, or about all three *as he wrote the poem.* Most of the poets whose work we included have no serious intentions of becoming professional writers, but they see differently, they talk differently, they think differently when they're playing the poet.

Part III—Students' Sustained Responses

In addition to the visiting writers program, the Humanities Center sponsored two continuing workshops during 1973-74. One was designed for *sixth-graders* who met in the Carriage House of the Center with Jeffrey Lorber as instructor. The other was planned for senior high school students; they met once a week in the Creative Writing Studio with Sally Harris Sange.

The sixth-graders under Jeffrey's direction did a series of "discovery" exercises. They discovered something of what poetry is about and they discovered, to some extent, something of what they are about. It was never enough for them to discuss whether a poem was good or bad. They wanted to know why the writer felt the way he did and why they wrote differently under workshop conditions than they did in the regular classroom.

One day Jeff informed them, "You are sitting at home alone. The radio is turned on to a station playing music. Suddenly, the music is interrupted by a news bulletin. The announcer says 'Enemy aircraft have been spotted over Canada's Dew Line. We are incapable of preventing them all from striking. They will be over New York in ten minutes. It is predicted that they will reach the Washington, D.C., area in ten minutes' Okay, you have ten minutes before you will be blown up. Luckily, you have paper and pencil handy. I understand that most of us would not normally stop to write, but let's say that is what you would do. You have nine minutes and thirty seconds remaining."

One of the instructive values of the exercise was that the *tone* of the writing was always clear. The students had no problem detecting that one writer was unusually calm, one was questioning, one was in a state of panic. The next step was to find the words, the phrasing, whatever it was that made the tone so clear.

That was poetic discovery. The other discovery, self-discovery, took place when the writers were surprised that they

were thinking of a bottle cap or fame or a neighbor or God during those last ten minutes of life.

During the year, each student wrote a poem-autobiography, a conversation among three inanimate objects, and several other poems and stories that taught him as much about himself as about writing.

These are some of the newest verses (theirs) to the familiar "Hush Little Baby":

HUSH LITTLE BABY

Hush, little baby don't you cry,
Momma's going to buy you a pizza pie.

If that pizza pie ain't hot,
Momma's going to buy you a silver pot.

If that silver pot is broken,
Momma's going to buy you a subway token.

If that subway token gets dirty,
Momma's going to buy you an itty bitty birdie.

If that birdie does not sing,
Momma's going to get a bell to ring

If that bell don't make a sound,
Momma's going to buy a big fox hound.

If that big fox hound don't bark,
Momma's going to buy a five-toothed shark.

If that five-toothed shark doesn't bite,
Momma's going to buy a purple light.

If the purple light don't show up,
Momma's going to get a loving cup.

If that loving cup don't shine,
Momma's going to get a sour lime.

If that sour lime's too sweet,
Momma got powder for stinking feet.

If the stinking feet don't smell,
Momma's going to buy an oyster shell.

If that oyster shell ain't clean.
Momma's going to buy a giant king.

If that giant king ain't nice,
Momma's going to buy you a pair of dice.

If that pair of dice don't shine,
Momma's going to get you a brand new dime.

If that brand new dime ain't good,
Momma's going to buy you a brand new hood.

If that brand new hood ain't dry,
Momma's going to buy you a chicken to fry.

If that chicken doesn't get hot,
Momma's going to buy you a parking lot.

If that parking lot goes broke,
Momma's going to buy you an artichoke.

If that artichoke ain't eaten,
Momma will give you a hommongus beating.

If that beating makes you sad,
Momma will buy you a puppy named Lad.

If that puppy dog is sold,
Momma's going to buy you a piece of gold.

If that piece of gold gets shiny,
Momma's going to buy you a horse named Tiny.

If that horse named Tiny goes wild,
Momma's going to get you a baby child.

If that baby child won't speak,
Momma's going to buy you a bird with a beak.

If that bird with the beak don't fly,
Momma's going to buy you a new necktie.

If that new necktie is too light,
Momma'll buy a dog with perfect sight.

If that dog with perfect sight can't see,
Momma's going to buy you a bumble bee.

If that bumble bee gets old,
Momma's going to buy you a baby bowl.

If that baby bowl should break,
Momma's going to buy you a pointed rake.

If that pointed rake gets dull,
Momma'll buy a record by Jethro Tull.

If that record has a scratch,
Momma's going to take you to a tennis match.

If that tennis match stops while its raining,
Momma's gonna get you a shot that's paining.

If that paining shot hurts too bad,
Momma's gonna buy you a brand new fad.

If that fad goes out of style,
Momma's gonna get you a big leaf pile.

If that leaf pile gets too rotten,
Momma's gonna buy you some potatoes augratin.

If those potatoes have one fly,
Momma's gonna buy you a pizza pie.

—Group poem
Middle School Workshop

This next group of poems and stories includes student writing that was conceived, written down, pondered over, revised, discussed, criticized, revised, argued, revised, and polished. We don't want to exaggerate—some of the poems were popped off in ten minutes flat. But some of them lay in desk drawers for weeks, waiting for the poet to get a little distance between his experience and his art. Many of them were discussed in the *Senior High Writing Workshop*, of which all the poets are members.

Revision is a highly individual process. Most writers don't sit down with a list of possibilities to check off. They simply commune with their work. Most writers are tough on the parts that don't sound right. If they've changed their mind since the first draft, they let the poem change. They try to be clearer all the time. But revision doesn't come only from the writer; the poem often changes the *writer's* mind about an experience.

To give you an idea of the kinds of changes a poet makes when he revises, we include several versions of three poems. In some cases, you may like earlier versions better than the finished poem. Try to think of each as a separate and complete experience before you attempt to link them all as a continuing process. (Numbered lines assist in identification during comments which follow.)

A

STATE FAIR 1973

Around the people
there are places
where others swirl
and form eddies
around this place
where no one walks.

Within its silences
there is a man quietly sleeping
he lies on a bench
and between the surrounding trucks

You can glimpse people walking
hurrying away
not wanting to look
and see the quiet
which they can not end.

B

STATE FAIR 1973

Within the people
there are places
around which others swirl
and form eddies
around this place
where no one walks
or wishes to
contained within its silences
a man quietly sleeping
he lies on a bench
and outside the trucks
forming the limits
which none cross
except the sleeping man
are people walking
hurrying away
not wanting to look
and see the quiet
which they can not shatter.

—Judy Wurtzel,
St. Catherine's School

A

UNTITLED

I

The street is dark
The houses silent
One front window watching the street
In it a lone piano.

II

A student bicyclist
puffs past,
his eyes wet from the wind.

As he pedals near the piano
a car roars past him,
honking.

B

DAGUERREOTYPE

I

A lone piano watching the street
from a
front window

II

A young man on a bicycle
puffs by,
his eyes wet from the wind,
his muffler fluttering.
As he pedals near the piano
a car roars past him,
honking.

III

Green rain against the window.
A gaunt woman plays Chopin,
her fiigers startling against the
keys.

IV

The front window is opened,
and the wind blows
long tendrils of white curtain
into the room.
A sheet of Chopin
drifts to the floor.

V

Twilight,
and the bus discharges
tired men and women on the
sidewalk.
A few turn down the street,
going past the piano.
Only one man turns
to look:
he sighs, and turns away.

III

Green rain against the window.
A gaunt woman plays Chopin,
her fingers startling against the
keys.

IV

The front window is opened,
and the wind blows
long tendrils of the white curtain
into the room.
A sheet of Chopin
falls to the floor.

V

Twilight,
and the bus discharges
tired men and women on the
sidewalk
A few walk down the street,
continuing past the piano.
Only one man turns
to look:
he sighs, and turns away.

VI

Morning: and as clouds break,
one long finger of sunlight
reaches
and reflects
off the piano keys.

—Debbie Wong,
Open High School

A

B

C

HEAD SYMPHONY IN BEE

High up, we find ourselves walking on precarious scaffolds.
The view is a blush
of wonders where injured autos are limping down the road like
a maimed pet. Meanwhile God operates

A gas station in the
middle of the forest.
A paradise it seems.

We ride down highway. Construction workers, barbarous, beer-
bellied and bare chested,
driving bulldozers through

mud like stoned sheep
through a pasture of soap.
Our car is driven by
23 horses, look. It is
lying on its side,
grinning grotesquely beside the insurmountable
road to the silent river.

An attempt was made
to contact the supervisor,
but no gas could be
found to operate the telephone.

1 High up, we find our-
2 selves walking on pre-
3 carious scaffolds.
4 The wiew is a blush
5 of wonders where in-
6 jured autos are limp-
7 ing down the road like
8 a maimed pet. Mean-
9 while, God operates
10
11 a gas station in the
12 middle of the forest.
13 A paradise it seems.
14
15
16
17 We dream down high-
18 way. Construction work-
19 ers, barbarous, beer-
20 bellied and bare chested,
21 drive bulldozers through
22
23 mud like stoned sheep
24 in a pasture of soap.
25 Our car is drawn by
26 23 horses, look. It is
27 lying on its side,
28 grinning grotesquely be-
29 side the insurmountable
30 road to the silent river.
31
32 An attempt to call the
33 foreman fails, there is
34
35 no gas to operate the
36 telephone.

1 High up, we find our-
2 selves walking on pre-
3 carious scaffolds.
4 The view is a blush
5 of wonders where in-
6 jured autos are limp-
7 ing down the road like
8 a maimed pet. Mean-
9 while, God operates
10
11 a gas station in the
12 middle of the forest.
13 A paradise it seems.
14
15
16
17 We dream down high-
18 way construction
19 workers, barbarously, be
20 bellied and bare
21 chested drive bulldozers
22 through mud like stone
23 sheep in a pasture
24 of soap. Our car is
25 drawn by 23 horses,
26 look. It is lying on
27 its side, grinning
28 grotesquely beside
29 the insurmountable
30 road to the silent
31 river. An attempt
32 to call the foreman
33 fails. There is no
34
35 gas to operate the
36 telephone.

D

THE UNFINISHED MASTERPIECE

1 High up, we find our-
2 selves walking on pre-
3 carious scaffolds.
4 The view is a blush
5 of wonders where in-
6 jured autos are limp-
7 ing down the road like
8 a maimed pet. Mean-
9 while the ambassador
10 of energy operates
11 a gas station in the
12 middle of the forest
13
14 and entertains the
15 foreman. They chase
16 flies with a butterfly
17 net. We dream down
18 highway. Construction
19 workers, barbarously, beer-
20 bellied and bare
21 chested drive bull-
22 dozers through mud
23 like stoned sheep in
24 a pasture of soap.
25 Our car is drawn by
26 93 horses. Look.
27 It is lying on its
28 side, grinning grotesquely
29 beside the insurmountable
30 road to the silent
31 river. A desperate
32 attempt to call the
33 foreman fails. There
34
35 is no fuel to operate
36 the telephone.

E

THE UNFINISHED MASTERPIECE

1 High up, we find our-
2 selves walking on pre-
3 carious scaffolds.
4 The scenery is a blush
5 of wonders where in-
6 jured autos limp
7 down the road like
8 maimed pets. Mean-
9 while the Ambassador
10 of Energy operates
11 a gas station in the
12 middle of the forest
13
14 and entertains the
15 foreman. They hunt
16 flies with a butterfly
17 net. We dream down
18 highway. Construction
19 workers, barbarously, beer-
20 bellied and bare
21 chested drive bull-
22 dozers through mud
23 like stoned sheep
24 in a pasture of soap.
25 Our car is drawn by
26 93 horses. Look.
27 It is lying on its
28 side, grinning grotesquely
29 beside the insurmountable
30 road to the silent
31 river. A desperate
32 attempt to call the
33 foreman fails. There
34
35 is no fuel to operate
36 the telephone.

—William Pahnelas, 12th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

Although, as we have said, revision is idiosyncratic, there are some general principals that prevail, at least among these three poets: They appear to be moving from

1) vagueness to clarity
2) the general to the specific
3) the superfluous to the sufficient
4) one point of view to another
5) cacophany to music
6) the assigning of mood to the dramatization of mood
7) redundancy to variety
8) relaxed usage to grammatical accuracy and consistency
9) conventional grammar to special usage
10) conventional phrasing to enjambment of lines
11) gratuitous cleverness to stylistic grace

1) All three poets revised according to his principle. It involves the honing of an amorphous perception into a sharp vision. It means knowing where the poem is headed and how it wants to resolve itself. It means clearing up all the little inconsistencies.

In Judy's poem, it meant understanding the geometric configuration of the dramatic situation. She changed the first line from "Around the people" to "Within the people." Her perception was turned completely inside out, requiring parallel changes in lines 3 and 11. As she began to grasp the psychological situation that she had set up and the emotional importance of sealing the man off from passersby, she formulated lines 7, 12, 13, and 14, and added the word "contained" to reinforce line 8.

You can see that Debbie's understanding of her poem allowed her to find a suitable title and to add section VI, which crystallizes the separate experiences of the other five parts. In revising, she found a beginning and an ending for her middle.

Bill (William) also found a title in his fourth draft. "Head Symphony in Bee" was so personal that no one but Bill could relate it to the poem. "The Unfinished Masterpiece" is derived from a direct experience of the poem. In version B, he changed several words. In line 17, *ride* became dream. In

line 25, *driven* became *drawn*. In line 33, *supervisor* became foreman. These will seem like minor changes unless you realize that the poem is about powerlessness, and the three substituted words are more passive in connotation (thus more suitable) than the 1st choices. In version D, "an attempt" became "a desperate attempt" (lines 31 and 32). *Desperate* increases both the sense of urgency and the realization that calling the "foreman" is the last resort. The role of the foreman becomes even clearer in version 1, when the Ambassador of Energy acquires capital letters for his name.

2) Becoming more specific is another principle common to all three poets' revisions. In version A, Judy's last line reads "which they can not end." In version B, the line became "which they can not shatter." Obviously, shattering the quiet would put an end to it; the denotation is the same. She has been more specific, though, about *how* the quiet would end. It would break into pieces (so much for all the containment and segregation) and be LOUD.

Following the same guideline, Debbie changed line 21: "falls to the floor" became "drifts to the floor." *To drift* is *to fall* but in a special way, as a piece of sheet music really would.

Likewise, Bill transformed the God of versions A, B, and C to "the ambassador of energy" in D. He wanted to refer to God, but only to special properties of God, i.e. his role as sender of energy. The word *God* calls up too many personal associations to work properly in the poem. He changed *gas* in line 35 to *fuel*. The word gas comes from the Greek word meaning *chaos*. There's plenty of chaos in the poem; what is needed is a focus. *Fuel* comes from the Latin *focus*. Again, apparent synonyms show their true colors when strategically placed in a poem. In the final version, line 4, *view* was changed to *scenery*. This reinforces the theatrical setting for the poem: what is seen is a painted backdrop, not a real view. Finally, in line 15, the *chased* butterflies became *hunted* butterflies. This implies that they are not even in sight; the attempt to catch them is more desperate than before.

3) Poetry is, above all, economical. There is no reason to give the reader information just because "it really happened that way," if the information doesn't fit the poem. There should be no wasting of words.

Judy found that line 9 could be reduced by two words. Debbie changed "a student bicyclist" to "a young man on a bicycle" (line 6) when she realized that whether or not the passerby was a student made no difference to the poem.

4) Both Judy and Debbie ultimately changed the point of view in their poems. Judy's line 15 of version A brought "you" into the poem unnecessarily. Debbie first had a window watching the street, then decided that it was the piano that was watching (section I).

5) In the first drafts, a poem will sometimes sound rather prosaic. Then underlying rhythms emerge, sound relationships are established, and the music of the poem shapes up. "Puffs past" in line 7 of Debbie's version A alliterates in a silly way, subverting the serious tone. "Puffs by" is more musical, and *by* makes contact with the *bi-* in *bicycle*. In Bill's version B, "An attempt to call the/foreman fails" is more rhythmically pleasing than "An attempt was made/to contact the supervisor" (lines 32 and 33).

6) A writer has a tendency, as he begins to put down his thoughts, to *analyze* a situation rather than evoke it dramatically. The reader, of course, wants to analyze for himself. That's part of the deal. So, in revising, the poet tries to give the reader all the trappings for experiencing what the poet himself experienced. In version A, Debbie flatly stated, from the beginning, that darkness and silence hang over her poem. By removing those 1st two lines, she let the reader discover those moods in the images themselves.

Similarly, Bill threw out line 13 (but not until version D) and proceeded, in lines 14-17, to *simulate* a seeming paradise.

7) Repetition is a useful element in poetry. Nevertheless, it must serve a purpose. If you write a poem, put it in a drawer for a week, and pull it out only to discover that you used the

word *receive* six times for no good reason, then it's time to revise. Debbie was unhappy with the repetition of *turn* in lines 25, 27, and 29 of version A. She wanted to keep two of them, to highlight the difference between turning *toward* and turning *away*. She threw out the line 25 *turn*. Bill caught himself with too many *throughs* (lines 21 and 24) in version A. He clarified the action by changing one of them to *in*.

8) The next four principles of revision (8, 9, 10, and 11) are interrelated and were seen only in Bill's work. They represent dilemmas that his special brand of poetry creates. That is not to say that all poets do not have to consider these principles. It's just that the struggle is particularly evident in Bill's revisions. There are several places in all versions where Bill had to correct purely mechanical errors, just as one would in a theme or any other writing. Punctuation, making a complete sentence, dividing a run-on sentence, achieving agreement in number and verb tense: All these were details he ignored in early versions and repaired in the finished poem. He needed the freedom early to get down his ideas.

9) Once a norm is agreed upon, a poet has that famous "poetic license" to disagree. Line 9 of version A has no comma after *meanwhile*. The comma was inserted in versions B and C. By the time he got to version D, he decided he really didn't need that comma after all. There was no way to misread the sentence, and "while" works better when it is *not* set off from "the ambassador" by a comma.

10) When a poet does not employ meter or rhyme, he tends to break lines at the ends of phrases. Not until version C did Bill begin to question some of his linebreaks. "Bellied and bare chested" (line 20 of version A and B) became "bellied and bare/chested" in version C. The reader has to push on after reading "bare." He must "turn the corner" of the line in order to make sense of it. Or, he can see the men as naked (simply bare) for the brief moment before he comes to the next line. At any rate, he trudges on in imitation of those bulldozing men. Bill refined this process in version D, when he divided "bull-/dozers."

11) The counterpart to dividing a natural phrasal unit is putting the units together in the line and dividing lines at natural pauses. Playing with divided words and double meanings can become such a game in itself that the poem loses its dignity and gets pushed around by the heavy hand of a "clever" writer. Bill is so intimately involved in words, sounds, and fine shades of meaning, that he falls prey to the trap sometimes. But, thank goodness, we don't have to publish our first fifteen drafts (except perhaps in this book). "Construction work-/ers" (lines 18 and 19 of versions A and B) is just plain confusing. This is remedied in version C. The same goes for "high-/way" (lines 17 and 18) and, especially, "be-/side" (lines 28 and 29).

Other poems and stories written by members of the Writers' Workshop, are printed in their final versions. No changes have been made except by the writers themselves.

You will see the influence of form, instances of creative rule-breaking, clichés that have been revived, and all the other processes we talked about in Part Two.

LOOKING IN A DIFFERENT SORT OF MIRROR

Living minerals enter a maze.
Hope seems to hide
around the next corner
but in the end
there is no exit.
Only more hope
to keep a selfish
soul in destructive
self-pity.

Friends await the moment
when talking iron ore
reveals itself to be
human by showing
emotions that usually
elude everyone's grasp.
This pencil and paper
achieved the impossible.

Since the elusive decision
has been made, what is in
store for the future?
another poem? a
funny cigarette?
There are razor
blades at low cost,
records to change
and dials to finger.

—Julian Amos, Jr., 12th grade
Adult Accelerated Learning Center

APOLLO

Oh, he's blue
Baby blue
Desert-wise, skyways
Blue jeans faded denim
Blue, blue, blue
Like this blanket tangled around us
And he is gold
My madonna around his neck
Sunset sand of satin gold
Mellow, warm eye-fleck gold
Oh, my lover is gold

—Alexis Bearer, 12th grade
St. Catherine's School

UNTITLED

the
country clubbers
want
letters
of recognition
and commemoration
and proclamation

the
country clubbers
want
bronze plaques
to
speak for them
i
will lay flowers
down on their bronze plaques

—Alexis Bearer, 12th grade
St. Catherine's School

FOUR-TONE MEMORIES

The clock strokes on relentlessly,
ticking away my life
with a gentle, even rhythm
punctuated at intervals
by a groaning deep inside it
that coughs up the hour in deep, bronze tones.

From the red rose
a petal drops
and settles, silent, on the table.
The vase throws green
images of the stem to
fleck the table with
moving shadows.

The house is silent—and the
clock wheezes up four tones
that echo through empty rooms
and simulate time.
Outside the shadows lighten—
I rub my coffee cup with
nervous hands and cold, dark coffee
splashes against the side
and forms a brown stain.

My mind throws
reflections of you everywhere—
I need no glossy photo to
see your face.
You seem to watch
over my left shoulder
and in the clouded
mirror,
I catch glimpses
of your mind.

The air here has grown stagnant
and age hangs on me
with fingers tight
as it never did when
I moved and lived.
Life begins to rise
and city-sounds
are flung up from the street below,
but I am left at four o'clock
to live in darkness
and remember the
illuminated existence
of a former time.

—Sally James
Tuckahoe Middle School

PURPLE LIES

Stems and their shadows
as made by the yellow light
populate the field under
purple violet heads.

An ugly little girl,
skinny fingers grasping,
clots her hand
with purple-violet blood
while resilient stems
curve upward and breathe.

The black bow from her hair
falls
and lies on
the frothy, dark sea
Royal violets, insulted,
fall back—
and are trampled
by innocent but vicious
feet
as she comes to collect
her bow.

Heads fall, and the wind
blows them like so many purple cards—
royal kings and queens and aces—
and then the ugly green stems rise
and finally see and breathe
as purple splendor blows away
and with it all chance of
royal beauty

only green, arching stems
are left to be free
in their naked
ugliness

—Sally James
Tuckahoe Middle School

SUNDAY

Watching the world turn green
through the grass blade,
burnt sounds hurl themselves
down on me, and
weakly,
I try to go back to my dreamy green world.

Fingernail clippings in a
chipped blue bowl—
a strangled curse as
Jenny drops the silver
platter,
and I disappear again into me.

They can't see me, hidden
under my mind's sloping wing—
gentle, generous, dove's gray wing.
I listen and hear,
and the sounds run around
till the echo ends in blue.

I settle back to enjoy the
tinted hues through grass'
green window, through
which my mind runs
to capture the dreams
hid in the dark brown soil.

—Sally James
Tuckahoe Middle School

MASHINE WASHABLE

I was woven from the fabric of eternity
and thrown into the washer when I reached twenty.
I was tossed into the freezer
and extracted by the tweezers
of a friend. This concern was more than I could comprehend.
In the sun I began to thaw.
Then I was snatched up by love's claw:
A maid with flowing golden hair
tossed me into her clothes lair.
Her application of make-up will suffice
to make her skin look smooth as ice.
Divided by deception,
separated from direct touch
drives away the lucid moments, puts me in confusion's clutch—
Renders me incapable of clear reflection
in the intoxicating atmosphere of lust.
You stroked my hair.
Now I am locked in with your underwear.

—William Pahnelas, 12th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

RERUN

That garden filching
chipmunk, nose to the
grindstone, shoulder to

the wheel, invariably
ended in bloodshed.
The mechanism became

messy, but compact. Its
mashed face photographically
flat, frozen and preserved

in screaming agony. The
last moment. At first
he could not accept my

ideas of recycling, re-
habilitation and reincar-
nation. But in three

days he was melting with
a smile.

—William Pahnelas, 12th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

JOY IN THE MORNING

Twelve glossy whitewashed
images on the saltshsaker
of mother spoke as they

had me cornered behind
a bowl of raisin bran.
Shape up said the swimming

faces, and get a haircut
and some grooming in your
attitude. Across the room

a water drop passed the
wrenched neck of the
faucet and fell, drip, and

of course you'd have seventy-
five percent more friends
if you didn't try to be so

different and drip, the
water fell while the water
fell down the drain,

drip.

—William Pahnelas, 12th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

DETERMINATION AND THE RIVALRY

The highway patrol man
maneuvers his blubberingly
thunderous bedeviled
caricature
of an automobile,

departure. In the
grey bag of his extra-
personal world he

transcends the mathe-
matical improbability
while the family is

left swimming in de-
liberate tears that
relieve the water

around the soul.

—William Pahnelas, 12th grade
Douglas Freeman High School

UNTITLED

the bus will stop if it sees me
standing there,
a forlorn figure
in swirling eddies of traffic

the doors will open and i'll
pay the fare;
the metal discs
will clang in the box

the motor will drone while
passengers stare
at unfamiliar scenery,
dusty through the plate glass

the bus will follow its prescribed route;
the driver doesn't care
around and around the same circle—
people know where to get on and off

—Clara Silverstein
Open High School

THE END OF A BOTTLE OF COUGH SYRUP

Slowly the thick, green liquid
Slithers down the walls
Of it's glass prison—
Creeping, crawling
Like a dying catterpillar

Then it finally escaped
Out the open curve of glass
And quietly sank
Into the quicksilver pool
Of spoon

—Clara Silverstein
Open High School

FOR ALL THOSE SWEET LITTLE GIRLS

I

Notice the magnolia tree
visable through
this second-story window

II

Branches begin at the trunk
and emanate outwards
ending in abbreviated clumps
of glossy, elliptical leaves

Breeze moves through top
and the sharp points of sunlight
searing the leaves
become lambent, dancing elusively

Visable between the spaces
where pliable fruit
meets stiff branch—
an array of lines and angles:
part of another shrub

III

Yes, I see!
OOOOh what a lovely thing
brownbarkandgreenleaves
makingshadeinthecity
it's so beautiful
uh and uh . . .

what's there to notice?

—Clara Silverstein
Open High School

ONE DAY . . .

cold metal chain links
the steel cut and twisted
holding up a frayed cloth seat

platform shoes drag
in the ancient hole of dust
scraped beneath the rusty swingset

she dreams of plucked eyebrows and curls
turned bushy
and to pigtails again.

—Clara Silverstein
Open High School

PUNCTURAIN

the hyphenated streaks of grey
become periods
as they meet the windshield
and form erratic tails as they drip
into commas

—Clara Silverstein
Open High School

WAITING (at the window)

The white dashes on the macadam road
following an orderly pattern.
The cars move uniformly too;
never weaving, just straight on.

An old woman shuffles up the sidewalk.
She wears a red bandanna
and sways—to the left, to the right
hunching pitifully over her cane.

The blackened winter bark of trees
eats into the leaden sky.
The network of scratchy branches
Serves to irritate it further.

Metallic grid of the screen
with its rows of tiny squares
overshadows the scene.

—Clara Silverstein
Open High School

FAIR POEM

Just step beyond the magic entrance gates
and you will be in paradise
the wild, glorious movement of the fair
will pulsate all about you

So where first?

Hey girlie, wanna tryataprize?
justknockdownthemilkbottles andyouwinyourchoice
ofapillow astuffedanimal anythingyouwant
itsonlytwennyfivecents howaboutit

No. It's a gyp.

Enter the green and gray cinderblock barns that crowd the
midway, their contents open to explore
Exhibits, free prize drawings, demonstrations,
contests, shows, free information
patchwork quilts and sausage samples and preserve jars
all stacked up in a row;
Knitted sweaters, and a bee farm
and TV set giveaways, and
reclining chairs, and free water,
and cooking demonstrations,
cows, pigs, horses

Manure stinks,

Pay only $1.50 for the thrill of your life
the giant new roller coaster, or perhaps
the merrygoround is more your style
only 50 cents
Encage yourself in a tiny cart and let the
wonders of modern machinery take ahold of
your mind and spin you off into never-never land
take your pick—
zipper, skywheel, giant-slide, round-up
wild mouse, surfer, rocket

I'm scared

Buy a carton of popcorn for the kids
or other assorted delicacies
candied apples, soft ice cream, coke
greasy hot-dogs with smelly condiments
cotton candy the texture of steel wool

My insides are queasy

Come, see the deformed baby
whose mother took LSD
The two headed woman, the man with
rubberized skin, the fat lady,
Siamese twins

Repulsive

Wander aimlessly in this paradise
of flashing neon bulbs, whirling on long arms
wade amidst the litter and filth—
a million paper cups, cigarette butts, torn tickets
trampled in the dust

join the happy throng

—Clara Silverstein
Open High School

DAY'S END

Oh, pudgy man
How do you see the sunset?

Are you watching
The streaks of crimson
Flaming high into
The ocean of turquoise sky?

Do you notice the grey-blue clouds
Surrounded by florida orange juice,
And the sun, like a giant candle,

Or can you just see
The reflection of too much glare
In your glasses

—Clara Silverstein
Open High School

100

IF I WERE A TREE

I'd bend with the wind,
drink from the soil,
and wear a garment of greenlace

In winter
i would stand naked
in the cold air
and be smothered
by slippery glass
and confectioner's sugar.

—Clara Silverstein
Open High School

UNTITLED

friday night with mother; cont'd.

let's talk in tonight's tense,
although moody.
the sea gulls have no food this winter;
they're young and don't know to fly low enough.
(mother's lost lessons).
wonderful water's doing its best, its only,
always forward and upward
cold wet effort's eagerness.
my winter skin is wrinkled and rough
and ya know what
i have curious brown searching-for-
something eyes outlined in
youth's red.
let's be knights and always move in L shapes—
upside down greek gamma.
i'm full of enriched bread,
world's wordiness is tedious, and
saturday's come . . .
mother's gold now shines on peasants' bodies,
wet with the sweat of eighteen karat chains.

—Stella Sotos
St. Catherine's School

ATTIC AFTERNOON

Quiet.
roof creaks in sunlight
Cat creaks too in
a furry sort of way
Tree looks different up here—

remember when Bilbo
climbed the big tree as lookout
Underneath it was all dark and dusty
he pulled himself up sunnier and
sunnier until he
Reached the top! and there were
hundreds of butterflies in
hundreds of colors and
far off maybe mountains and
he never ever wanted to come Down

that's what my tree's like
only you have to imagine the butterflies—
And i know if you look hard enough
over the buildings across the street and
past the William Byrd Hotel there're
maybe mountains too

—Debbie Wong
Open High School

DIVA

llama woman
has deep-furred eyes
long neck
wary friendship,
touch and go but
once there, forever.
nightwatcher?
maybe: we'll never know for sure
but she sings her own song

—Debbie Wong
Open High School

UNTITLED

in the friendly darkness of the bus
worked with watery yellow lights
i listened to you talk to me
watched the shadows run over your face
like so many mice
i guess i wished it could go on forever

later, when my car pulled away from you
i watched the headlights pour across you
as if you were drowning
and i felt a pang of worry that
you might not be strong enough
to surface over them

—Debbie Wong
Open High School

OLDER SISTER

Michael said,
"Open the window,
it's hot in here."

"No,"
I said,
"it's cold and raining
and the floor will get all wet
(I don't want to have to dry it)
and I don't feel like
freezing to death just because
you wanted the window open."

Marble silence.

I listen to the rain
waltzing on the window.
I look up, and the rain
has formed a web of water
on the screen.
I suddenly think of the way
a street smells in the rain,
the damp warm scent of old tar,
and I remember how
Lisa and I used to wait for
rainy days so we could
sneak out with bare feet and
umbrellas
to go listen to sewer songs.
The sewers were wide and
so deep that you couldn't
see the bottom,
and it was exciting and frightening to
sit at the sewer's mouth
watching the water rush downwards.
Here in the city
we don't have sewers like that.

The rain skittered against the window
like a reminder.

"Michael,"
I said.
"Would you open the window?"

—Debbie Wong
Open High School

PRE-TWILIGHT ACROSS THE JAMES

late afternoon sun
floods bus

the few riders are quiet
it is the end of the day
they seem almost asleep

I pull my music closer to me
hold my flute against my chest
look out the window at the tree-shadows

brakes scream, sob
bus comes to slow halt by tollgate
then shudders down a slight decline

burst out into wide orange light!
tree-shadows gone
up high above the world

down far below, the river
miles to the left, the river
miles to the right, the river

all bare rocks and struggling trees
flat quiet pools
small white waterfalls

a jump and the bus is fighting up an incline
tree-shadows lash my eyes
the river is gone like an old dream

bus gasps onwards through the leaping tree-shadows
orange light flits and bounces
everyone seems to be dozing

music rustles in lap
flute gently knocks against collarbone
as bus sways

—Debbie Wong
Open High School

A FORTY-YEAR-OLD WOMAN IN THE THEATRE LOBBY

"And I said, 'mama, you don't have your white gloves on!' "

with your perfectly-curled silver hair
harshly reflecting the flourescent lights

"And I said, 'what will papa say!' "

with your immaculate light green designer suit
matching shoes and a black patent leather pocketbook

"And I said, 'I didn't expect this from you mama!' "

as you adjust the angle of your flowered hat
and dab your eyes with a french linen hankerchief

—Judy Wurtzel
St. Catherine's School

HALLUCINATIONS IN THE DESERT

Puddles of water
(my fingertips just miss)
Iron to magnet—me to puddle I am drawn
So coool.
The river overflows and floats lazily towards me
(my fingertips just miss)
Lying on the squeegee dried hills
I reach out
(my fingertips just miss)
On top of seared barren hills I am baking
Why am I a raisin with my juice all gone?

—Judy Wurtzel
St. Catherine's School

RECIPIENT

Black pupils, a light blue iris ringed
with yellow near the edges, and framed with
long blonde lashes,
which hide you when you are shy

Probing into dark brown unringed eyes
you don't blink but I do
averting your stare
demure I back away
must you look so deep to find the answers
to the questions
for which there are still no words
with which to say them?

—Judy Wurtzel
St. Catherine's School

Understand that I didn't like Mr. Noble. And Noble did not like me. Typically, that would have given him the advantage, of course—he being my physics teacher—but we enjoyed a peculiar relationship, and one in which physics played a small part indeed. That Noble and I ever developed rapport is no small wonder, for Noble was weak and gray after having chalked up his years on our high school's blackboards, and initially I regarded the fellow with disgust. Nonetheless, I learned to enjoy Noble, and though I didn't care for him, I was continually amused by his awkard life. At the end of fifty years he could be seen pacing out his days in a science project showcase, and I watched the man at my leisure and contemplated his misery.

As for his physical appearance, Noble was on the smallish side of a medium build. He had oily white hair and cheeks that hung down to his chin. He wore a thick pair of bifocals and without them he could not see. The lenses were round with fragile wire rims that miraculously kept the heavy glass in place. But to my horror, Mr. Noble never cleaned his glasses. The lenses were caked in dirt, chemicals and dried globules of an unidentifiable origin. The old man, I think, was so blind without his glasses he had no inkling of how dirty they were. He had peered at the world through his murky lenses so long he had forgotten what clean vision was. Then again, it may have been an unconscious desire to dirty a world too clean for his tastes. He provided himself with mud-tinted spectacles, as it were. In any case, Noble's bifocals were an embarrassment to all. You could look into his eyes if you wished, but you couldn't look at his glasses.

There was a naive faction of people who believed that Mr. Noble once cleaned his glasses during the Christmas break. That is absurd. The so-called evidence rests solely in the claim that Noble's bifocals seemed rather less dirty after the holidays. While that may be so, I can hardly believe that Noble undertook the cleaning of his glasses. Sooner they slipped into the sink and he frantically groped for them, retrieving them before the accumulation could completely wash off.

I never challenged Noble outright, nor did I disrupt his class or cheat on his exams, such were not my weapons. Rather I snickered at the old fellow and laughed out loud should he imagine himself important. If his facade of adequacy fooled others, Noble knew it did not fool me, and he was horrified by my perception.

For all his weakness I must admit that Noble once surprised me. In an unprecedented act of daring, the man took his life. Official school releases said Noble acted with "indiscretion," and while he

did go at it a bit theatrically, it must be said there was a certain gusto and excitement about his death from which legends are fashioned.

Noble's chosen day was oppressively humid. I slunk into class feeling particularly antagonistic and was disappointed when I didn't see Noble. I sat down and waited, expecting him any minute, when someone said, "Tardy bell rung and teacher not here."

It was a profound observation, Noble never missed a chance to mark students tardy. A student ran to the door and looked up and down the hall. "He not there," he said.

My concern mounted, I was surprised and slightly piqued that Noble should offer me this puzzlement. "He'll come panting in here in just a moment." I said aloud, though I rarely spoke. The class turned to look at me and then everyone was talking.

Eight minutes crept by, and suddenly pretty Miss Dibrell ran into our room. She looked about, red and wide-eyed, and she said, "Class, remain where you are. Absolutely nothing is wrong. Mr. Noble cannot be with you today." She turned and ran, and to a man we rose and followed, quietly considering what had happened to our teacher. Miss Dibrell scurried to a door we never used. It opened into a stairway leading steeply to the attic, and up it we charged, Miss Dibrell at the head of the column. The attic was shadowy and buried in text books, and various lovers, unimpressed by the search but noticably interested in the attic, wandered off. The frightened Miss Dibrell did not notice and she ran before even the most sincere searchers. "He's on the roof," she called and vanished into the creaking darkness.

When I finally gained the roof, Miss Dibrell had long since disappeared into the maze of coolers and vents. Only by carefully tracking the loud and pleading voices of Noble's detractors was I able to find the man himself. He stood at one far corner of the roof, jacket off and tie dancing in the wind as he joyfully heaved physics books far out into the sky. He had quite a supply of them, and Earth Science texts too, but now he was concentrating on the former, and he energetically directed each one in a great fluttering arc that finally saw them into the street. Noble watched closely each hardbound missle in flight, as if expecting one of the books to defy all the wise rules it represented, and delighted in the crunching sound made on impact. Then he would nod his approval, wipe the perspiration from his brow, and take another book from his pile.

The shallow Miss Dibrell and Mr. Grimes our principal cheapened Noble's social rebellion with their panic and loud petition. Noble admirably put up with them, and only when they came too close did he

bother with them. Then he held up his hand, and smiled politely, and waited until they regained a proper distance.

I was unhappy when in a minute or so a dozen students found Noble. I felt that this scene properly belonged to only Noble and myself and that these random spectators merely diluted the effect. Still we were silent, and went unnoticed for about two dozen books when Miss Dibrell suddenly remembered us. "The children," she cried, and she ran to me and pulled me towards Noble. "What about those who depend on you, how they look up to you and care for you." The outbreak caused Noble to lose his cadence and he turned to look at me, his glasses hanging precariously from his nose. At first Noble looked troubled but then he smiled in triumph. He knew this was his Great Hour and he knew for once I was in no position to gloat over his misplaced life. I was frightened now that death gave Noble the edge, and hoping I could pull the rug from under his little show, I condescendingly offered him my pen and pencil, and that if it pleased him, he could throw them. But Noble smiled (he made a disconcertingly happy suicide) and said no, those were for me to throw. I stared at Noble and his glasses, and he turned back to his books. I walked to the wall and dropped my pen and pencil over the guardrail and heard them strike the sidewalk. Though he didn't turn around, Noble acknowledged with a nod my contribution, and I stepped back to give him room.

Mr. Grimes sensed I hadn't deterred Noble from his purpose, and he directed the other students rapidly from the roof and yelled that Miss Dibrell must call the police. Then he looked to me and while largely incoherent, effectively had me understand that he didn't know who I was or what I knew about Noble, but he'd find out. Then he cautiously stepped up to Noble and tried to talk him into a full salary sabbatical in Southern California.

The battered ranks of books were still increasing in the street when a car stopped and the puzzled driver climbed out. Mouth open, he squinted up and down the street, and then he picked one of the texts up and read its cover. He grinned. He was flipping through it a second time when with a fraternal crash another book joined the others. In a moment the startled fellow had located his tome-wielding foe, and his eyes shielded from the sun he called.

"Hey, Noble, that you?" Noble didn't answer. " 'member me, J. Colliers? Hey, I had you second period one year. Hey, you was a crazy dude." Noble cried from the roof, "Einstein was all wrong," and the reminiscing Colliers began to drop-kick the books back toward the school.

"Oh yeah," Colliers called, "Always wingin' that chalk at us when we didn't lissen. . . . This year must be a real roughie, huh Noble?"

"God most assuredly plays dice," Noble replied.

I was suddenly aware of a siren whining in the distance, and Noble stopped to listen. Dutifully interested, Colliers gazed up the street for a glimpse of the police car, and was surprised when instead of roaring on it turned and headed for the school. Colliers stood still for a moment, and then he looked back up at Noble. "Hey man," he said, "What you up to anyway?"

Noble's time was running out, and I think it finally occurred to the man that he was going to kill himself. He looked haggard and frightened, and he wanted a way out. He had ridiculed the school and Mr. Crimes, and I know he thought that was enough. He was getting the last minute jitters, and I quickly stepped in and demanded that Noble go ahead. Like a little child he whimpered that he'd done enough, but I corrected him, and pointed out that suicide would constitute the only importance that would be tacked onto his life. He seemed partially reassured, and he took off his glasses.

Mr. Grimes had turned pale when he saw the first police car scream to a stop in front of the school. He looked faint now and he sat on the remaining pile of texts. The school alarm rang, and the roof shivered as eight hundred surprised students pushed back their chairs and squeezed for the exits.

Noble was cleaning his bifocals for the first time in his life. He scraped at them with a tissue, spat on them occasionally, and soon had them relatively clean. Then he stepped back and threw them into the sky. They rose silver, winked twice at the sun and disappeared.

I left Noble then, and I never saw him again. I think of him often though, the man occupies much of my time now as then, and in fact I have his glasses. That night I went to the school with a flashlight and I searched in the grass until I found them.

I carry the bifocals with me now, though not out of deference to Noble; I carry them because they fascinate me. They linked Noble to his world, and they exercised power over the old man. Sometimes I slip them on, but they are dirty again and difficult to see through.

—R. Kendall Soulen

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Kofi Awoonor of Ghana, one of the most widely read West African writers, is both a novelist and poet. He writes poetry in his native Ewe language and in English. While chairing comparative literature program at State University of New York at Stoney Brook 1973-1975, he visited Virginia Commonwealth University and Richmond metropolitan area schools.

John Ciardi, who holds a celebrated position in the world of literature and letters, is a professor, author and editor. Since 1956 he has been poetry editor for Saturday Review and regularly writes the column, "Manner of Speaking," in that periodical. He has published twenty-nine books among which are collections of poetry, children's books, translations of Dante and books of criticism.

Stephen Dunning, who is highly respected in his profession, is a past president of National Council of Teachers of English. He is professor of English and education at University of Michigan. He has published many articles, reviews, essays, professional and classroom materials. Widely known among these publications are the Scholastic Literature Units and poetry anthologies which he has edited.

Jeffrey Lorber, who holds a M. A. in creative writing from Hollins College, is a teacher, actor and poet. His poems have appeared in several poetry magazines.

Michael Mott, whose novels and poetry are recognized on both sides of the Atlantic, is an art historian and editor as well as novelist and poet. He is writer-in-residence at Emory University. He has published seven books among which are two adult novels, two children's novels and three collections of poetry. The most recent volume, Absence of Unicorns, Presence of Lions was published February, 1976.

Gloria Oden, whose poetry has appeared in many anthologies and several poetry magazines, is both a lawyer and professor.

She is assistant professor of Humanities at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. As well as project director for textbooks, she has held numerous poetry readings and been lecturer in black poetry at several universities.

Sally Harris Sange, who translates contemporary American poetry into Arabic, is also an instructor in Arabic and a poet. She co-edits the Dialogue series published by the Humanities Center and conducts student workshops in creative writing. Her poems have been published in several poetry magazines.

William Jay Smith, who has received numerous literary honors, is both a poet and critic. He has published a dozen well-known books of poetry for children, including Laughing Time now in its tenth printing. In 1970 a television program of his children's poetry, "Mr. Smith and Other Nonsense," won an award as best childen's program of the year on educational television.

Tom Weatherly, who is a columnist for Brooklyn Heights Press, has also edited an anthology of poetry, Natural Process: an anthology of New Black Poets. He has published three collections of poetry and conducted poetry workshops in New York City schools and in New Jersey schools.

Sylvia Wilkinson, who is fast becoming one of the best creative teachers in the contemporary academic community, is a novelist and feature story writer. She has published five books among which are a novel Cale, published in 1970, and The Stainless Steel Carrot, a racing book published in 1973. Her articles appear in Sports Illustrated and Sports. In the spring of 1977 Houghton Mifflin will publish her next novel, Shadow on the Mountain.

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS AND POETS
1973-1974

William Jay Smith
- St. Catherine's Lower School
- John B. Cary Elementary School

Kofi Awoonor
- Huguenot High School
- Maggie Walker High School
- George Wythe High School
- J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School

John Ciardi
- J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School

Stephen Dunning
- Harry F. Byrd Middle School
- St. Christopher's Middle School

Tom Weatherly
- Thomas H. Henderson Middle School
- Highland Springs High School
- Henrico High School
- John F. Kennedy High School

Sylvia Wilkinson
- St. Catherine's Upper School
- Midlothian High School
- J. R. Tucker High School
- George Wythe High School
- Henrico High School

Gloria Oden
- Franklin Elementary School
- Tuckahoe Middle School
- Open High School
- John B. Cary Elementary School
- Thomas H. Henderson Middle School
- J. R. Tucker High School

Michael Mott
- Douglas Freeman High School
- Hermitage High School
- Midlothian High School
- West End Elementary School

Sally Harris Sange
Humanities Center

Jeffrey Lorber
Humanities Center
Byrd Middle School

PARTICIPATING TEACHERS
1973-1974

Barbara Bell
Dale Bishop
Suzanne Bell
Margaret Burcham
Eliza Cofer
Brenda Epperson
Cathy Giles
Bill Gray
Christine La Clair
Caroline Latimore
Pauline McLemore
Buffy Morgan
Gary Muzick
Marian Newell
Susan Nolte
Mimi Oppenheimer
Barbara Petty
Fannie Price
Wayne Rafferty
Gayle Robinson
Sally Rosenberg
Janice Rosson
Alma Roundtree
Bill Smith
Ron Smith
Scott Strong
Marian Tanner
Berthenia Taylor
Helen Thompson
Joyce Todd
Hortense Vaughan
Ann Venturino
Marian Waymack

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